EACH IN HIS OWN WAY

AND TWO OTHER PLAYS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THREE PLAYS
Six Characters in Search of an Author
"Henry IV"
Right You Are! (If You Think So)

THE LATE MATTIA PASCAL
An important novel of the New Italy

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

EACH IN HIS OWN WAY

AND TWO OTHER PLAYS

BY

LUIGI PIRANDELLO

FROM THE ITALIAN BY

ARTHUR LIVINGSTON

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In the originality of its form, "Each in His Own Way" suggests the manner of "Six Characters In Search of An Author." We may say, indeed, that if the latter was the drama of the writing of a play, "Each in His Own Way" is the drama of the presentation of a play. Taking a character from contemporary life, and mindful of a recent experience in his own career as an author (where a woman in "real life" recognized herself in one of his plays), Pirandello has tried to dramatize an Italian—a Latin—"first night," with its claques, its critics, its partisanships, all that strange commotion which features new artistic events in nations that have a long tradition of art, and no tradition of parliamentary decorum.

But this is only the external element in "Each in His Own Way" (let not one confuse it, as the "Six Characters" was confused, with a skit on dramatic criticism). Deeper down, this play presents a general picture of life as Pirandello sees it—as though, after viewing the human soul in special aspects in the many plays he has written since 1919, the author felt the need of summing up, reconstructing the whole canvas in its totality, in a play that would show the wider relationships of the many themes which he has elsewhere treated.

Here we see the Stream of Life, which Bergson would call the "vital urge" (and Freud, maybe, the Unconscious), flowing along with its silent, mighty, irresistible tide. Two individuals, Delia Morello and Michele Rocca, would stem its flow: they are overwhelmed in the tumultuous torrent that the Stream becomes as the feeble dikes, which they have con-

structed against it, break. Other individuals, Doro Palegari and Francesco Savio, are floating on the same Stream, but in its less dangerous back-waters. Unaware of the power that grips them, they are amazed, bewildered when the waters about them begin to roar and finally dash them up, unharmed, on the dry land. Another character, Diego Cinci, stands in the position of the author, Pirandello. He knows that the Stream is there; he understands the plights of the victims who are caught in it; he guesses the course along which they will probably be swept; and he laughs—the cynical, Homeric laugh of the late Mattia Pascal; the charitable, good-humored laugh of Laudisi (in "Right You Are"); the bitter, ironical laugh of Daniele Catellani (in "A Goy") the laugh, in short of Pirandello.

In distinguishing, however, between an external and an internal or deeper element in "Each in His Own Way," we should note how they are blended. Writing a play within a play, Pirandello assumes that the situation of the two characters in the play (in fiction, that is) is the situation of two people in "life" (in the audience which witnesses the play). And the solution of that situation in the play later reproduces itself as the solution of the situation in "life."

The conventions within which we try to imprison the Stream of Life, to build up our individuality of what is pure flux, pure continuity, are of an intellectual character; and as we state them to ourselves and to each other, they are logical and rational. But woe unto him who would trust their logic in foretelling conduct! Contradiction—the denial of logic—is the law of individuality. A man was this, yesterday—he is the opposite, today. He is this today—he will be something else, tomorrow. Viewing people in their conventional aspects, we find only chaos, incoherence. Whereas the Stream of Life is uniform. When we know its tendencies, the directions of its currents, we can foretell whither it will bear its

victims. That is why Life often "plagiarizes" from Art; in the sense that the artist, penetrating the fictions which people live before their own minds, can tell what these same people must do long before they have done it, or dream of doing it. (This theme recurs also in "Naked," the third of the plays here printed.)

What becomes of Michele Rocca and Delia Morello, when they run off the stage, and out of the play, at the end of the second act? Pirandello does not tell us. There is no third act! Notice, however, that they had been struggling with a fiction: a belief that all along they had each been acting in the interests of Giorgio Salvi. When this logical fiction breaks down, they have nothing, momentarily, to cling to as the flood of life (their love for each other) beats against them. They are swept away. These moments are the great dramatic moments in Pirandello's art. We speak of Pirandello's laughter, of his irony, of his intellectuality. But there is also a Pirandellian frenzy—the unspeakable anguish that engulfs his characters when everything gives way in—precisely!—a tidal wave, an inundation, a cataclysm, the breaking of a dam, the collapse of a suspension bridge!

As an audience looks at "Each in His Own Way," it will be looking at an audience which is looking at a play. Here, as Pirandello says, are four "planes of reality"; or, we might say, four planes of fiction, since reality is as unreal as fiction, and fiction as real as reality. On each of these planes we have a reality consistent with itself. Of the four realities, indeed, following the theme of the "Six Characters," the reality in the play is the most "real"—at least the only one that is fixed and eternal. At the end of the first act it occurs to Signora Moreno to force her way from the plane of the audience in the play into the plane of the play itself; and "under such conditions," says Pirandello, "the play cannot go on." In one of his most amusing stories, "The Bat" (*"Il*

pipistrello"), Pirandello has a bat fly into a theatre where a play is in progress. In this case not only does the play go on, but it goes on to a triumph most humiliating to its author. I suggest that, if we reason subtly, the play is seen to continue even in "Each in His Own Way." If Signora Moreno disturbs the reality of the play by rushing from the audience upon the stage, the play gets its revenge by seeing its own ending reproduced in life.

Here is another principle of unity in this play of clashing realities. The astute director will gain interesting effects, I believe, by partly bridging the gap between his two "audiences" (the one that pays, and the other that is paid), seating the characters of the interlude in the orchestra of the theatre. The stage directions, however, do not call for this.

The theme fundamental to "Right You Are" (*"Così è se vi pare"*) is an important one also in "Each in His Own Way." The tragedy of which Delia Morello is the center looks differently to different people. Doro Palegari and Francesco Savio have opposite interpretations of her conduct. But so varying and contradictory are the appearances which reality produces in the world of rationality, that we soon find the two men ready to fight in defence of the view which they were at first ready to fight against. Delia Morello is deceived by the same appearances. Conscience tells her that she was treasonable toward Giorgio Salvi. On the other hand, "the goodness which she has at bottom" leads her to grasp at a rationalization of her conduct which makes her out almost a heroine. But she is suddenly brought face to face with Michele Rocca—a shock that causes the whole fabric of fiction to crumble. Her actions were really explainable, not as Palegari or Savio had explained them, nor yet as she had explained them to herself; but by a third set of motives of which both she and they were totally unaware.

The "mystifications" and "irrelevances" in the first act

now become clear. They explain Pirandello's concept of the relation of "conscience" to the Stream of Life. Conscience is a complex of judgments in which we express our desires to be, or to seem to be, what we are not. It is part of the bulwark we throw out to buttress individuality against the pressure of instinctive Life. Diego Cinci is aware of this; and he is also aware of the tricks these deeper currents play on us—only occasionally invading, meantime, the surface of conscious life, intruding with some irrelevancy into a field which we supposed we had already set in order by will or by reason.

This looks like a rash venture, on Pirandello's part, into psycho-analysis. But it is an integral element in his interpretation of life; it was fully involved in "The Late Mattia Pascal" before Freud and Jung were ever heard of. If a spiritual ancestor for this thought must be sought, we might find it in Spinoza,—especially as regards its ethical bearings. For Pirandello ethics arise in the course of the intellectual effort we make to transform the flood of unconscious, subconscious being into conscious reality. Ask one of Pirandello's characters to justify himself, and he will explain how he came to do what he did, showing that what he did he had to do; with the result that his conduct being necessary is also moral. Life itself is neither moral nor immoral: it is amoral. Morality is a matter of appearances. It will vary with the most surprising and contradictory affirmations according as appearance varies.

In "The Pleasure of Honesty," we have the triumph of the Stream of Life over a bulwark deliberately erected in its path: an honesty as logical as it is unnatural. Only a scoundrel could accept, for ordinary motives, such a situation as Angelo Baldovino accepts. An adventurer in applied philosophy, he is lured to experimenting with a formula for

transforming this rascality into honesty. He can do this by eliminating all questions of interest and by insisting that others live up scrupulously to the fiction which he lives.

The play is logically perfect. Honesty, to be such, cannot be anything else than honesty: it must be real, in other words, and be real by imposing its laws upon a mere "respectability" which would treat this honesty as a convenient fiction. In these circumstances it works havoc in the plane below it, revealing "respectability" as dishonesty, and a dishonesty as consistently dishonest as the honesty is honest.

But Life boils up around this obstacle artificially built on shifting sands. The Marquis Fabio and Maddalena, beings of convention, dead chips borne hither and thither by the forces around them which they never understand, are the first victims. Agata alone—with a courage born of terror—is able to play the game according to its rules. Her love and her self-sacrifice bridge the chasm between the fictional world where Baldovino is living and reality. He cannot live as a "pure form." The man in him revolts. A husband and father *pro forma,* he becomes husband and father in fact.

Long after the successes of "Six Characters" and "'Henry IV'," Pirandello regarded this play as his "best"—seduced, probably, by the very things, extraneous to his cold and sombre art, which make it the most attractive to many people. "Life," the life that triumphs in this play, is a warm humanity, rising clear and hopeful from a drab morass. Even the austere intellectual that Pirandello professes to be finds a bit of sentiment refreshing in moments of less intense cerebration. In the transformation of Baldovino there is something of the softer note that gives "Sicilian Limes," "He Didn't Mean It," and "Giacomino" an actual charm.

Since individuality is a more or less permanent, a more

or less transitory, solidification of the fluid of life, it may be thought of as a pillar of masonry sunk in midstream, and throwing an otherwise smooth and silent and mighty current into a turmoil of eddies and foaming whirlpools. A human being's life consists of one long effort to affirm individuality against the flood of instincts, emotions, desires, animal impulses, that would carry it along.

Dramatically, a number of situations arise in these circumstances.

First, the case where we see the pillar in process of construction in the stream—the awakening of individuality to self-consciousness (one of the themes in "Six Characters").

Then the case where, despite the raging of the currents, the individuality holds its ground. (This would be the triumph of fiction over reality, the domain, in a Pirandellian criticism, of the old sentimental and ethical drama.)

Then—a modified form of this latter situation—the case where the individuality holds its ground but is conscious of the struggle it is making, is aware, to use Pirandello's other figure, of the mask it wears, of the fiction it lives—hence ironic laughter, the characteristic Pirandellian comedy.

Finally, the case where the pillar, the artificial construction, collapses before the torrent of life, is swept from its foundations, and destroyed. In ordinary life, where the stream is controlled, canalized, damned, *utilized,* by laws, traditions, customs, habits and so on, such breaks appear as crimes, suicides, crises of passion, of conscience. With this imagery in mind, a newspaper makes interesting reading. Pirandello is criticized for stressing "exceptional cases," and disdaining "normal" people. But in the "exceptional case" we see the substance of which life is made, uncolored, unmodified by convention—pure life. "Normal" people, are people so thoroughly encased in disguises that we never know what they really are, and rarely do they know themselves.

Ersilia Drei, in "Naked," is a person who never quite succeeds in getting her feet on the ground (thus Americanly I translate Pirandello's verb *"consistere"*). As her tragic narrative unfolds we see her striving to construct an individuality for herself: first as a wife, then as, at least, the heroine of a novel, then as a pitiable, romantic creature for whose misfortunes humanity can be persuaded to shed a passing tear. But Life, impersonated in the victims of her falsehood, sweeps her along from each place where she would stop. She is the humble soul awakening to self-consciousness in the depths of society where destiny has placed her. She would be somebody, instead of nobody. But people strip her of her fictions! She dies as "nobody," she dies "naked."

A number of themes combine in this play at one moment or another. Ersilia Drei, philosopher-servant girl, realizes, to her great distress, that as her personality is transferred into a character of artistic fiction, that character will not be she but another woman. Then again she faces the fact (one of the leading motifs in " 'Henry IV' ") that the past is irrevocable, that we cannot be again something that we have been (save by assuming the past as a mask, a fiction, which reality will soon tear off). Lodovico Nota is the enlightened observer who understands the inner logic of instinct, and holds to a tolerant and sympathetic humanity; whereas the other characters, as appearance varies, drift from contradiction to contradiction.

Ersilia Drei seems to me one of the most violently impressive characters in Pirandello's now populous world. Her tragic figure stands out in sharp outlines against the plain background of a commonplace, almost sordid world, which speaks a language just as plain and unadorned.

The text almost calls for "The Street," as the title of this drama. I have kept rather close to the Biblical phrase which Pirandello himself chose; in deference to the precedent set by

his play called "The Mother," which he finally entitled "The Life I Gave Thee." The "street" which rumbles all through this play has a symbolical value, probably. It is the Stream of Life which is ever washing up a new victim drowned in its currents, and is ever there to swallow up those who "see themselves," who would exchange, that is, illusion for life.

To those who would seek a clear and precise conception of Pirandello's "art," I must address a word of caution against certain errors which are not easy to avoid. Pirandello has repeatedly protested against any judgment of his world based on criteria foreign or extraneous to that world.

The unusual form of many of his plays may lead us, for instance, to say, as many critics have said, that the distinctive feature of his art lies in his "originality." But we say this when we have, really, nothing to say. The analysis of his dramatic devices would never take us beyond the externals of his drama: it could never reveal the essence of his art.

Or again, we might be tempted to overstep the limits of Pirandello's world and locate his "art" in some of the implications that world might have for other worlds—the worlds of convention, or morality, or sociology, or what not. One may have noted the humanity, for instance, in "The Pleasure of Honesty"; or the pathos of "Sicilian Limes"; or the indignation, the spirit of social protest, in *"Pensaci Giacomino";* or the sentimentality of *"Ma non è une cosa seria"* ("He Didn't Mean It"). Implicit in most of Pirandello's plays is a certain kindly tolerance that is surely one of the most engaging traits of his personality. It is a platitude, almost, to think of irony as Pirandello's most characteristic feature; just as many critics, in reviewing "The Late Mattia Pascal," sought the art, when not in the conventional formulas of the "æsthetics of circulation" (the only æsthetics in real vogue

in America), in the humor which was its conspicuous mannerism.

All of these paths, inviting though they be, lead us from the right road.

Stripping reality of the attributes that make it seem to us most real, reducing personality to a fleeting, changing moment in a series of moments, identifying illusion with reality and vice-versa, breaking the individual soul up into many souls and putting these into conflict one with another, Pirandello makes people over into something like ghosts, of a very diaphanous, insubstantial texture. Now the Pirandello play is an affirmation of this concept of life: it is almost a thesis and a demonstration. With the result, that we see before us the process of this disintegration, this dismemberment, this evaporation, of personality. We experience, accordingly, a certain weird bewilderment, a certain tense strain, a "torment of the spirit" as Pirandello himself would say, born of our fruitless clutches at something substantial, definite, real which always escapes us. This mood blends now with terror, now with laughter, now with irony, now with tolerance, now with an almost superstitious awe. But it remains the underlying mood of Pirandello's plays. It is the essence of his art.

An art that is fresh, original, new—I can think of nothing to compare it with, except the art of the dream literature which finds its classic monument in the theatre of Calderon.

CONTENTS

PAGE

EACH IN HIS OWN WAY..... 1

THE PLEASURE OF HONESTY..... 91

NAKED 161

EACH IN HIS OWN WAY

(*Ciascuno a suo modo*)

A COMEDY IN TWO OR THREE ACTS
WITH CHORAL INTERLUDES

CHARACTERS

CHARACTERS OF THE COMEDY ON THE STAGE:

DELIA MORELLO (referred to in the interludes as "the leading lady")
MICHELE ROCCA
DONNA LIVIA PALEGARI (an old lady)
HER GUESTS (men and women of her own age who feel quite at home in her house)
DORO PALEGARI (her son)
DIEGO CINCI (a young friend of Palegari)
FILIPPO (a butler of long service in the Palegari household)
FRANCESCO SAVIO (who starts the quarrel)
PRESTINO (one of several other friends of Savio)
FENCING MASTER
BUTLER (in Francesco Savio's house)

"REAL" PEOPLE, APPEARING IN THE THEATRE LOBBY:

DELIA MORENO (whose connection with the play everybody understands)
BARON NUTI
STAGE MANAGER
LEADING LADY (who is the same as Delia Morello in the play)
OWNER OF THE THEATRE

Business Manager
Ushers
Policemen
Five Dramatic Critics
Old Author (who never had a play accepted)
Young Author
Literary Man (who would write if the public were not beneath his contempt)
Good-Natured Spectator
Bad-Humored Spectator
A Man Who Understands
A Man Who Never Understands
One or Two Supporters of Pirandello
An Army of Antagonists
Spectator From the Social Set
Ladies and Gentleman (from the audience)

The public is requested to remain seated at the end of the first and second acts, for the curtain will at once rise again for the choral interludes. The number of acts in the comedy cannot be made more specific in view of unpleasant incidents that will arise during the course of the performance.

EACH IN HIS OWN WAY

A COMEDY IN TWO OR THREE ACTS WITH CHORAL INTERLUDES

ACT I

The ancient palace of Donna Livia Palegari. *It is tea time, and the guests are about to leave. Through the back drop, which presents three arches and two columns, a sumptuous drawing-room brightly lighted and with an animated company—ladies and gentlemen—can be seen. The front of the stage, less brightly lighted, is a smaller parlor ornately decorated in damask, and with ancient paintings (of religious subject, for the most part) on the walls. As we look at the stage we should get the impression of being in a shrine in a church, of which the drawing-room beyond the columns might be the nave—the sacred chapel of a very worldly church! The parlor in the foreground is unfurnished save for one or two benches or wooden stools for the convenience of people desirous of studying the paintings on the walls. There are no doors. The guests will come into this retreat two or three at a time to exchange confidences in private; and in fact as the curtain rises, we meet there: an* Old Friend *of Donna Livia and a* Young Man *(one of the guests), engaged in conversation.*

Young Man. Well, what's your idea of it?

Old Man *(with a sigh).* My idea of it? *(Pause.)* I

really couldn't explain. *(Pause.)* What are other people saying?

Young Man. Oh, some one thing, some another.

Old Man. Of course, each his own private opinion!

Young Man. But none of them, when you come down to it, seem to be sure of themselves. They are all like you. Before they'll tell you what they think, they want to know what others are saying.

Old Man. Oh, as for me, I am absolutely sure. But . . . it's common sense, isn't it? I'm not anxious to make a fool of myself. Before I say anything definite I ought to know whether other people may not have some information which I have not yet had and which might in part modify my judgment.

Young Man. But what do you think, so far as you know?

Old Man. Oh, my dear boy, we never know everything!

Young Man. Well, in that case, what are opinions worth?

Old Man. Dear me, opinions? My opinion is a view that I hold until—well—until I find out something that changes it.

Young Man. Not at all, if I may press the point. The moment you say that we never know everything, you take it for granted that facts exist which would change your mind.

Old Man *(looking at him thoughtfully and smiling)*. Are you trying to corner me? You're trying to make me say that I have no opinion?

Young Man. How can you? From your point of view I shouldn't think anyone could have an opinion.

Old Man. Well, refusing to have an opinion is a way of having one, isn't it?

Young Man. Yes, but in a purely negative way.

Old Man. A negative way is better than no way at

all though, my boy. *(He takes the young man by the arm and starts back with him toward the drawing-room, where some girls can be seen serving tea and cookies to the guests. A pause. Two young ladies steal cautiously into the parlor.)*

First Young Lady *(eagerly)*. So you know all about it then? Oh, you darling! Tell me! Tell me!

Second Young Lady. But remember, it's only an impression I have.

First Young Lady. When *you* have an impression it's sure to be worth hearing. Was he pale? And you said he was sad!

Second Young Lady. He seemed that way to me.

First Young Lady. I should never have let him go away! Oh, and I felt that way at the time—here, in my heart. I went as far as the door with him, his hand in mine. He was a step outside, and still I held his hand. We had kissed each other good-bye. We had separated—but our hands—no, no—they just refused to let go! But tell me, won't you? He made no reference—?

Second Young Lady. Reference to what?

First Young Lady. No — I mean — well — I mean whether—well, you know—speaking in a general way as one often does—

Second Young Lady. No, he said nothing in particular. He was listening to what the others were saying.

First Young Lady. Ah yes. Because he—*he* knows. He knows what harm we do through this silly habit of talking we all have. Whereas, so long as we have the slightest doubt, we ought to keep our lips shut, tight. But we talk—we talk—and we don't know what we are talking about, ourselves! But you said he was pale—and sad! You don't remember what the others were saying, do you?

Second Young Lady. No, I really don't. However, I shouldn't like to have you disappointed, my dear. You

know how it is—we are so easily mistaken. It may have been indifference, but it seemed to me that he was pale; and when he smiled it was such a sad smile. Wait, I do remember! When somebody said—

First Young Lady. What did somebody say?

Second Young Lady. What was it now? Wait—somebody said: "Women are like dreams—they are never the way you would like to have them."

First Young Lady. He didn't say that, did he? You are sure?

Second Young Lady. No, it wasn't he.

First Young Lady. Oh my, my, my! Anyhow, I don't know whether I am making a mistake or not. I've always been proud of acting in my own way under all circumstances. I'm a very good-natured person; but I can be spiteful on occasion. And if I ever am—well—it'll go hard with him!

Second Young Lady. I hope you will never be any different from what you are, dear.

First Young Lady. But what am I, really? I'm sure I don't know. I assure you I don't know—even myself! All this way and that, fickle, changing, my feet off the ground! First I'm here and then I'm there. I laugh. I go off into a corner to have a good cry all by myself. Oh, how terrible it is! Sometimes I just have to hide my face to keep from seeing myself. I am so ashamed at realizing how different, how incoherent, how unreliable I am from time to time.

(At this moment other guests come into the room; two Young Men (dressed in the height of fashion) much bored with the party; and, with them, Diego Cinci.)

First Young Man. Hope we're not intruding?

Second Young Lady. Not in the least. Please, do come in!

Second Young Man. So here's the chapel! The confessional, you might almost call it, eh?

Diego. Yes. There's only one thing lacking. Donna Livia ought to have a father confessor here for the convenience of her guests!

First Young Man. And why a priest, pray? We have our own consciences.

Diego. Yes, but what do you do with your conscience?

First Young Man. My conscience?

Second Young Man (*solemnly*). "Mea mihi conscientia pluris est quam hominum sermo."

Second Young Lady. Why, that was Latin, wasn't it?

Second Young Man. Exactly, Signorina. A quotation from Cicero. I remember it from my school days.

First Young Lady. And what does it mean?

Second Young Man *(solemnly)*. "I care more for what my conscience says than for what the world says!"

First Young Man. We have a popular saying something like that. "With conscience clear, never fear!"

Diego. If we were the only ones—

Second Young Man *(not understanding)*. What do you mean? If we were the only ones—?

Diego. I mean that then the approval of our own consciences would be sufficient. But in that case it would hardly be a question of conscience any longer. Unfortunately, my friends, I'm here, and you're here! Unfortunately!

First Young Lady. Unfortunately, he says!

Second Young Lady. And not very nice of him either!

Diego. Why, I mean—we've always got to consider other people, my dear young lady.

Second Young Man. Not at all, not at all. When my own conscience approves—

Diego. But don't you see that that blessed conscience of yours is nothing but other people inside you?

First Young Man. Your usual philosophical clap-trap!

Diego. But it's not so hard to understand. *(To the second young man.)* When you say that you are satisfied with the approval of your own conscience, what do you mean? You mean that other people may think of you and judge you as they choose—even unjustly, let us say; but that you, meantime, will hold your own head high in the assurance that you have done no wrong. Isn't that what you mean?

Second Young Man. Yes, I guess so.

Diego. Well, then, how do you acquire that assurance except from other people? Who can assure you you have done no wrong?

Second Young Man. I do myself. It's my conscience. What else?

Diego. All you're saying is that other people in your place, meeting, in other words, circumstances similar to yours, would have done as you have done. That's all you are saying, isn't it? Or indeed, you mean that above and beyond definite concrete situations in life, certain abstractions, certain general principles, exist on which we can all agree—and why not?—since agreement, in the case of principles merely, costs so little! But notice now: if you shut yourself up disdainfully in your ivory tower and insist that you have your own conscience and are satisfied with its approval, it is because you know that everybody is criticizing you, condemning you, or laughing at you—otherwise you would never think of saying such a thing. The fact is that the general principles in question ever remain abstractions. No one is able to recognize them as you do in the situation in which you find yourself, nor are people able to see themselves acting just as you acted in doing what you did. So then you say that the approval of your own conscience is sufficient—but sufficient for what, if you please? Does it enable you to enjoy standing all by yourself against the world? Not at

all, not at all! As a matter of fact, you are afraid of being at outs with everybody. So what do you do? You imagine that there are any number of heads all made like your own, heads in fact that are duplicates, replicas, of your head. And you think you can shake those heads to say 'yes' or 'no,' 'no' or 'yes,' just as you please; and that comforts you and makes you sure of yourself. Oh, interesting game, I grant you! But what else does that conscience of yours amount to?

Second Young Man. But what do *you* do, may I ask?

Diego. Oh, I play the game the same as you. I have my conscience too, I should say so!

First Young Lady. Oh, how interesting! But, I'm sure it's getting late! I think I must be going!

Second Young Lady. Yes, yes, everybody seems to be going. *(Turning to Diego and pretending that she is much offended.)* How entertaining you have been!

First Young Man. Hadn't we better be going too? *(They step back into the drawing-room to pay their respects to the hostess and to take their leave. The company in the parlor, meantime, has thinned out perceptibly. The last guests are bowing to Donna Livia, who finally steps forward into the parlor, great anxiety written on her face. She is leading Diego Cinci by the hand. The Old Man whom we saw at the rising of the curtain and a Second Old Man follow after her.)*

Donna Livia *(to Diego)*. Oh no, Diego, please don't go! Please don't go! You are the best friend my son has in the world, and I am quite beside myself. Tell me, is it true? Is it true—what these dear old friends of mine have been saying?

First Old Man. I was careful to point out, Donna Livia, that we had no real information to go on.

Diego. You are talking about Doro? What's happened to him?

Donna Livia (*in surprise*). What? Haven't you heard?

Diego. I haven't heard anything. Nothing serious, I trust. If it had been, I am sure I should have heard.

Second Old Man (*half closing his eyes to soften the shock of what he is about to reveal*). We were referring to the trouble last night! A bit of a scandal, you know . . .

Donna Livia. . . . at the Avanzi's! Doro stood up for that—that—what's her name?—that woman!

Diego. Scandal! What woman?

First Old Man (*as above*). Why, that Morello person. Who else?

Diego. Oh, you are talking about Delia Morello!

Donna Livia. So you know her then?

Diego. Know her? Who doesn't know her, Signora?

Donna Livia. So Doro knows her too? It is true then! He knows her!

Diego. Why, I suppose so. Why shouldn't he? And what was the trouble about?

Donna Livia (*turning to the first Old Man*). And you said he didn't!

Diego. He knows her the way everybody knows her, Signora. But what happened?

First Old Man. But remember, remember! I was careful to say just what I said: that he stood up for the woman, *perhaps without ever having spoken to her in his life!*

Second Old Man. Yes, that's the way he knew her. Just her general reputation!

Donna Livia. And yet he stood up for her, even to the point of coming to blows?

Diego. Blows? With whom?

Second Old Man. With Francesco Savio.

Donna Livia. Why, it's incredible! The idea of starting a fight—a fight—in a respectable house, of respectable people! And for a woman of that breed!

Diego. Why, perhaps in the course of an argument . . .

First Old Man. . . . Just so . . . in the heat of an argument . . .

Second Old Man. . . . as so often happens . . .

Donna Livia. Please, gentlemen, don't try to spare my feelings. *(To Diego.)* *You* tell me, Diego, *you* tell me! *You* know all about Doro.

Diego. But why so wrought up, my dear Signora?

Donna Livia *(putting her foot down).* No! You pretend to be a real friend of my son. In that case it is your duty to tell me frankly all you know about the matter.

Diego. But I know nothing whatever about the matter. Surely it can't be of much importance. Why so excited over a mere word or two?

First Old Man. Ah, as for that—now you're going a step too far! I don't follow you! . . .

Second Old Man. You can't deny that the affair made a very great impression on everybody present.

Diego. But what affair, for heaven's sake?

Donna Livia. Why, he stood up for the woman! Why, he actually came to her defense! Does that seem to you a matter of no consequence?

Diego. But, my dear Signora, the whole town has been talking about Delia Morello for three weeks past. She is the topic of conversation in the cafés, in the clubs, on the sidewalks, wherever you go. She is in the headlines of the papers. You must have read about her yourself.

Donna Livia. Yes, a man committed suicide on her account.

First Old Man. A young painter he was, named Salvi.

Diego. Giorgio Salvi, yes!

Second Old Man. A youth of great promise, it seems.

Diego. And it seems that there was someone before him.

Donna Livia. What! Another man?

First Old Man. Yes, it was mentioned in one of the papers . . .

Second Old Man. . . . that *he* committed suicide too.

Diego. Yes, he was a Russian. That, however, happened some years ago at Capri.

Donna Livia *(shuddering and hiding her face in her hands).* Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!

Diego. But for heaven's sake, you're not afraid that Doro is going to be the third, are you? I must say, Signora, that we all have a right to deplore the tragedy that has robbed us of an artist like Giorgio Salvi; but after all, when we know the situation as it actually was, it is quite possible—possible, notice—to say something in defense of the woman.

Donna Livia. So you defend her too?

Diego. Yes, I too, to that extent! Why not?

Second Old Man. Challenging the indignation of all decent people in town, I suppose!

Diego. Perhaps! I was simply observing that something may be said for the woman.

Donna Livia. But my own son, my Doro! I always thought he kept the best of company.

First Old Man. He was a good boy . . .

Second Old Man. . . . always knew how to behave himself.

Diego. But it was an argument, wasn't it? Well, in an argument he may have said more than he really meant. He may have exaggerated.

Donna Livia. No! No! Don't you try to spare my feelings! Don't you conceal anything from me! Delia Morello—she's an actress, isn't she?

Diego. I should call her a lunatic, Signora.

First Old Man. She has been on the stage.

Diego. But she couldn't hold her job anywhere. No manager dares take the risk of hiring her any more. Delia Morello can't be her real name. That must be just the way she is known on the stage. No one knows who she really is, nor where she comes from.

Donna Livia. Is she a good-looking woman?

Diego. They call her beautiful.

Donna Livia. Oh, they're all beautiful—those actresses! I suppose Doro met her in some theatre.

Diego. I believe he did. But at the most it couldn't have been more than an introduction, a visit to her dressing-room, back-stage, perhaps. And that is not such a terrible thing as many good people imagine, Signora. Please don't worry!

Donna Livia. But here two men have gone and killed themselves on her account!

Diego. I would not have killed myself for her!

Donna Livia. But she made those two fellows lose their heads.

Diego. I wouldn't have lost mine!

Donna Livia. But I'm not worried on your account—I am thinking of Doro!

Diego. Never fear, Signora! And one more thing: if that unhappy woman has done wrong to other people, she has always done the greatest wrong to herself. She's one of those women who are made haphazard, so to speak, who seem unable to get hold of themselves—wanderers astray on the face of the earth, never knowing where they're going nor where they will end. And yet sometimes, you know, she seems to be just a poor little child afraid of the world and appealing to you for help.

Donna Livia (*much impressed, and seizing him by both*

elbows). Diego, look me in the eye: you got that from Doro!

Diego. No, Signora!

Donna Livia *(insisting).* Tell me the truth, Diego. Doro is in love with that woman!

Diego. I am sure he isn't.

Donna Livia *(still insisting).* He is! He is! He is in love with her. What you have just said only a man in love with her could say!

Diego. But they're my words, not Doro's!

Donna Livia. That isn't so. Doro talked that way about her to you. And no one can convince me that he didn't!

Diego *(shrinking before her persistence).* Oh! Oh! *(Then with sudden eloquence, his voice becoming clear and light, caressing, inviting.)* Signora, can't you imagine—imagine—a carriage—driving along a country road—through the open fields—on a bright afternoon in summer time?

Donna Livia *(dumbfounded).* A carriage—on a country road! What's that got to do with it?

Diego *(angrily and deeply moved).* Signora, can you imagine the condition I was in when I sat up all night watching at the bedside of my mother, dying? I sat there—and do you know what I was doing? I was staring at a fly, a fly that had fallen into a glass of water on the lamp-stand and was swimming about, his wings flat on the surface of the water—And I sat there watching him. I didn't even notice when my poor mother died! I was all taken up in admiring the confidence that poor fly seemed to have in the strength of his two hind legs. They were longer than the others. They were made for him to get his start with. He kept swimming about desperately, always confident that those two hind legs would finally lift him above the liquid surface where he was caught. But whenever he tried to jump, he

would find that something was sticking to the ends of them. So every time he failed, he would rub them together furiously, to clean them—and then he would try again! I sat there watching him for more than half an hour; and then I saw him die—and I did not see my poor mother die! Now then, do you understand? Let me alone!

Donna Livia *(dumbfounded, bewildered, stands there looking first at one and then at the other of the two old men who are as much at sea as she is).* I beg your pardon—I don't see the connection!

Diego. Does it seem to you so absurd? Well, tomorrow now, I assure you, you will laugh . . . you will laugh at all these fancied terrors you are feeling for your son when you think of that carriage on the country road which I have just trundled along before your mind's eye the better to confuse you. But please realize that I can never laugh as I think of that poor fly that came before my eyes while I was sitting there watching at my mother's bedside. (*A pause. Donna Livia and the two old men stand looking at each other after this abrupt diversion, more than ever confused, unable in spite of all their efforts to make this carriage on the country road and this fly in the glass of water fit into the subject which they had just been discussing. Diego Cinci is all absorbed in memories of his mother's death; so that when Doro Palegari enters, at just this moment, Doro will find Cinci in a very unusual frame of mind.)*

Doro *(looking first at one and then at the other of the company in surprise).* Why, what's the matter?

Donna Livia *(coming to herself).* Oh, it's you! Doro, my boy, what have you been doing? What have you been doing? These gentlemen have been telling me—

Doro *(snapping angrily).* About the "scandal," I suppoes? Saying that I am in love, head over heels in love, with Delia Morello, eh? I suppose so! All my friends wink at

me as I pass them on the street. "Eh, how's Delia, old boy?" Heavens above! What's got into you? Have you all lost your minds?

Donna Livia. But if you—

Doro. If I, what? I can't understand it, upon my word! And a scandal made of it, within twenty-four hours!

Donna Livia. But you came to the defense of that—

Doro. I came to nobody's defense.

Donna Livia. At the Avanzi's last evening!

Doro. At the Avanzi's last evening I heard Francesco Savio express, in regard to the tragic suicide of Giorgio Salvi —about whom, by the way, everybody is having his say— an opinion which did not seem to me a fair one. So I contested it! That's all there is to it!

Donna Livia. But you said certain things. . . .

Doro. Oh, I may have talked a lot of nonsense. All I said I really can't remember. In an argument one word follows on another. I may have exaggerated! But hasn't a fellow a right to his opinion on topics of the day? It seems to me we can interpret certain episodes in one fashion or another as we see fit. Today it is this way, tomorrow it's another. For example, if I happen to see Francesco Savio tomorrow, I shall be quite ready to admit that he was right and that I was wrong.

First Old Man. Oh, in that case, very well.

Donna Livia. Do so, please, Doro! Please do so! By all means!

Second Old Man. . . . to put an end to all this gossip, you understand.

Doro. Oh, not for that reason. I don't care a hang about the gossip! I would be doing it only to get rid of the mortification I feel myself!

First Old Man. Quite so. Yes, quite so . . .

Second Old Man. . . . at seeing yourself so misunderstood!

Doro. Not at all, not at all! The mortification I feel at having let myself go so far—an anger justified perhaps by the spectacle of Francesco Savio sitting there, stupidly arguing, with his facts all wrong; though he after all—well yes—he was right, substantially! So now, when I've cooled off a bit, I'm ready—yes, I'm quite ready—to apologize. And I will do so. I will apologize in the presence of everybody, to put an end to this absurd dispute. My, what a row over nothing! I'm disgusted.

Donna Livia. Well, I'm much relieved, Doro, much relieved! And I'm glad to hear you admit right here in the presence of a friend of yours that nothing can be said in defense of such a woman.

Doro. Why, was he trying to defend her too?

First Old Man. Yes, he was—that is to say, after a fashion . . .

Second Old Man. Not in earnest, you understand! Just to soothe your mother's feelings.

Donna Livia. Yes, and I must say he wasn't succeeding very well. But now what you have said is a great relief to me. And thank you, thank you ever so much, my boy.

Doro *(angry, irritated at the implication of his mother's gratitude)*. But — you're really serious? You — why, mother, you make me angrier than ever! I'm getting mad, clear through!

Donna Livia. Angry—because I am thanking you?

Doro. Well, I must say? Why do you thank me, in fact? Why are you so much relieved now! I see, you thought that . . . I swear, mother, I'll be flying off the handle!

Donna Livia. No, no, don't be angry! Let's say no more about it!

Doro *(turning to Diego)*. So you think something can be said for Delia Morello?

Diego. Oh, let's drop the subject—now that your mother is quite herself again.

Doro. No, I insist on knowing. I insist on knowing.

Diego. So you want to start the argument over again with me?

Donna Livia. Please don't, Doro.

Doro *(to his mother)*. No, it was just a matter of curiosity. *(To Diego.)* I wanted to see whether you were making the same points that I brought up last evening in my quarrel with Francesco Savio.

Diego. And suppose I were. You don't mean to say you would be on the other side now?

Doro. Do you think I'm a whirligig? Last evening I took this position: I said: "You can't claim that Delia Morello intended to encompass the ruin of Giorgio Salvi because of the simple fact that the night before she was to be married to him she went off on a lark with another man; since the real ruin of Salvi would have been for him to marry her!"

Diego. Exactly! Just my view of it. And the Morello woman knew this too; and, precisely because she knew it, she was determined to prevent it.

Doro. Nothing of the kind! Savio was right in holding that she went off with that other fellow, Michele Rocca, to push her vengeance on Giorgio Salvi to the limit—because there is no escaping the fact that in all this affair she acted at all times and under all circumstances with the most refined treachery toward him. There!

Diego. So that's your view of it? Well, keep to that opinion. And much good may it do you! At any rate, let's drop the subject now!

First Old Man. Wisely said! And now we must be going, Donna Livia. *(He kisses her hand.)*

Second Old Man. . . . delighted that everything has

been cleared up now! *(He also kisses her hand. Then turning to the others.)* Good afternoon, Doro, and you too, Cinci.

Diego. Good afternoon! Good afternoon!

Donna Livia *(turning to the first of the two friends and starting back with them to the drawing-room, from which they will depart through an exit to the right.)* So then, when you get to Christina's—just tell her that I'll be calling, and ask her to be ready. *(Donna Livia withdraws. For a moment Doro and Diego stand there without speaking. The empty drawing-room brightly lighted in the background behind them should give an interesting effect.)*

Diego *(spreading the fingers of his two hands fan-shaped, then crossing one hand over the other so as to form a network of his fingers, finally stepping up to Doro to attract the latter's attention)*. This is the way it is—look!—this way —exactly!

Doro. What?

Diego. That conscience we were talking about in here just before you came. A net, an elastic net! You slacken it up a little like this and good-bye!—the madness we each have in us runs amuck!

Doro *(after a brief silence, worried, suspicious)*. You mean that for me?

Diego (*almost talking to himself*). Before your mind the images, the memories, piled up during the years, begin to crowd—fragments of the life which you have lived perhaps, but which never gains the forefront of your consciousness because you have never been willing or able to view it in the clear light of reason . . . questionable things you may have done; lies of which you would be ashamed; thoughts that are mean, petty, unworthy of you; crimes you have thought out and planned in their minutest particulars; desires unconfessed and unconfessable—and it all, all, all comes

up in your mind and throws you off your balance, till you don't know where you're at, leaving you disconcerted, bewildered, terrified!

Doro (*as above*). What are you talking about, man?

Diego (*gazing fixedly into space*). And I hadn't slept for nine nights in succession. . . . (*He turns vehemently upon Doro.*) Try it for yourself! Nine successive nights without a wink of sleep! The white mug on the table beside your bed has a single blue line around it—and that infernal bell! Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding! Eight . . . nine! I used to count them! Ten . . . eleven! The clock striking, you see! Twelve! Not to mention the quarters and the halves . . . ! There's no human affection strong enough to hold its own when you've neglected those primal needs of the body which must—must, I tell you!—be satisfied! There I was, outraged at the cruel fate which had fallen upon the ghastly, unconscious, unrecognizable body of my poor mother —nothing but body left of her, poor thing—well, do you know what I thought? I kept thinking: "God! I wish she'd stop that gasping!"

Doro. But my dear Diego! Your mother . . . why . . . she's been dead at least two years, hasn't she?

Diego. Yes! And you have no idea how surprised I was when the gasping did stop for a moment. The room fell into a terrible silence, and I turned—I don't know why—and I looked into the mirror on the dressing-table. I was bending over the bed to see whether perchance she might have died. But the mirror was so placed that I couldn't help seeing—seeing what the expression on my face was like, the expression, that is, which I was wearing as I bent over to look at her . . . a sort of joyous terror, a sort of terrible joy, the joy that would welcome my liberation. . . . But she gave another gasp, and that gasp gave me such a shudder of loathing for the thought I had been thinking that I

buried my face in my two hands as though I had committed a crime. And I began to weep—to weep like the child I once had been—for my poor mamma, whose pity . . . yes! yes! it was her pity I wanted, pity for the fatigue I felt, the fatigue I felt for having been there nine sleepless nights in succession! You see . . . yes . . . at that instant I had ceased to hope that she would die. Poor, poor mamma! How many nights' sleep had she lost when I was a little child—and sick?

Doro. Would you mind explaining why you talk about your mother this way, all of a sudden?

Diego. I don't know, I'm sure. Won't you tell me why you got angry when your mother thanked you for having put her mind at ease?

Doro. Why, it was because she actually suspected for a moment, herself—

Diego. Oh, get out! You can't make me swallow that.

Doro *(shrugging his shoulders)*. I don't know what you're driving at.

Diego. If such a suspicion on her part had not been well founded, you would have laughed instead of getting angry.

Doro. What do you mean? You don't seriously think . . . ?

Diego. I? You are the one who is thinking it?

Doro. But now I'm taking Savio's view of the matter.

Diego. So you see. . . . First here and then there! You are even angry at yourself—for your exaggerations, as you called them!

Doro. That is because I now see . . .

Diego. No! No! Be frank with yourself! Read your own thoughts, accurately!

Doro. But what thoughts shall I read, man alive?

Diego. You're now agreeing with Francesco Savio! But

do you know why? It's to hide a feeling which you've had inside you without your knowing that it was there.

Doro. Nothing of the kind! You make me laugh!

Diego. It's true! It's true!

Doro. You make me laugh, I say!

Diego. In the excitement of the argument last evening that feeling suddenly came to the top in your mind. It caught you off your guard . . . and you said things you didn't realize you were saying. . . . Of course you didn't! Of course you didn't! And you imagine you never even thought those things! And yet you did think them . . . you did think them! . . .

Doro. What do you mean? When?

Diego. Secretly . . . unknown even to yourself! Oh, my dear Doro, just as we sometimes have illegitimate children, so we sometimes have illegitimate thoughts!

Doro. Speak for yourself, eh!

Diego. Yes, I'll speak also for myself! . . . We all yearn to marry, and for our whole life long, some one particular soul . . . the soul which seems most convenient, most useful, to us . . . the soul which brings us in dowry the faculties and qualities most likely to help us attain the goals to which we aspire. But later on, outside the honest, conjugal household of our consciousness, we have . . . well . . . one affair after another, numberless little sins with all those other souls which we have have rejected and buried in the depths of our being, and from which actions and thoughts are born—actions and thoughts which we refuse to recognize, but which, when we are forced to it, we adopt or legitimize . . . with appropriate adaptations, reserves, and cautions. Now, in this case, one of your own poor, fatherless thoughts has come home to you. You deny paternity . . . but look it over carefully! It's yours! It's yours! You were really

in love with Delia Morello . . . head-over-heels in love, as you said!

Doro. Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! You make me laugh! You make me laugh!

(At this point the butler, Filippo, enters the room.)

Filippo. Signor Francesco Savio, sir.

Doro. Oh, here he is now! *(To Filippo.)* Show him in!

Diego. And I will leave you alone with him!

Doro. No! Wait! I want you to see how much in love I am with Delia Morello! *(Francesco Savio appears in the drawing-room.)*

Doro. Come in here, Francesco, won't you?

Francesco. Why, my dear Doro! And how are you, Cinci?

Diego. Glad to see you, Savio!

Francesco *(addressing Doro)*. I came to tell you how sorry I was about our little squabble last evening.

Doro. I was just on the point of going to look you up to tell you how sorry I was.

Francesco (*taking his hand warmly*). That's good news, Doro, my boy! You have taken a great weight off my mind!

Diego. I should like to have a picture of you two fellows, upon my word!

Francesco (*to Diego*). You know, Diego, we two have been friends all our lives . . . and we were on the point of breaking over nothing!

Doro. Oh, it wasn't quite so bad as that, was it!

Francesco. Why, it was on my mind all last evening! I can't understand how I could have helped recognizing the generosity which prompted you . . .

Diego *(breaking in)*. Exactly! The *generosity* which prompted him to defend Delia Morello!

Francesco. Yes! And so that everybody could hear too!

And it took some courage . . . with all those people yelping against her!

Doro *(puzzled)*. But . . . do you mean to say . . . ?

Diego *(to Francesco)*. And you more rabid than any of the rest!

Francesco *(warmly)*. Yes. Because I had not given enough weight to certain considerations, one more sound and convincing than the other, which Doro, here, brought forward!

Doro *(with rising anger)*. Ah! So *that's* it! So you now . . . so you now! . . .

Diego *(breaking in)*. Exactly! So you now are standing up for the woman, are you not?

Francesco. But Doro stood out against the whole crowd! He held his ground in the face of all those fools, and they couldn't find a thing to answer him with!

Doro *(to Francesco, at the height of his irritation)*. Listen! You know what you are? . . . You're an ordinary circus clown!

Francesco. What do you mean? I came here to see you to admit that you were right! . . .

Doro. Yes! And that is why I say: you are just an ordinary circus clown!

Diego. You see, just as you now have come to the point of agreeing with him, he had already come to the point of agreeing with you!

Francesco. Agreeing with me?

Diego. Yes, with you . . . with you because of the things you said *against* Delia Morello! . . .

Doro. . . . and now you have the impudence to come and tell me that I was right!

Frances. But—simply because I have thought over all you said!

Diego. Exactly! Don't you see? Just as *he* has thought over what *you* said! . . .

Francesco. And now he says *I* was right . . .

Diego. Just as you say *he* was right!

Doro. Yes! You say that now . . . after you made a fool of me last night . . . in the presence of everybody! Set them all talking about me . . . and nearly drove my poor mother out of her mind! . . .

Francesco. I? . . .

Doro. Yes! You! You! You just drew me on . . . getting me into an argument . . . trying to compromise me . . . making me say things that I would otherwise never have dreamed of saying! *(He steps up to Francesco and faces him angrily.)* Just take a suggestion from me! You be very careful not to go around saying to anybody that I was right! . . .

Diego *(pressing his point).* Because you see, you recognize the generosity which prompted him! . . .

Francesco. But I do . . . I do! . . .

Doro. You're just an ordinary circus clown!

Diego. You see . . . if you go around saying that he was right that will show that you, too, know the truth now . . . the truth, that is, that *he is in love* with Delia Morello . . . and that he came to her defense *on that account!*

Francesco. That is the third time you're called me a clown, notice!

Doro. But it won't be the last! I'll say you're a clown one hundred times . . . today . . . tomorrow . . . always!

Francesco. Please remember that I am in your house!

Doro. In my own house I say that you're a clown . . . but even when I'm not in my own house I'll say you're a clown! You're a clown! A clown! A clown!

Francesco. Very well! Very well! In that case . . .

good afternoon! And we'll see each other later, eh? . . . *(He starts to leave the room.)*

Diego (*in an effort to detain him*). One moment . . . one moment! Let's not go too fast!

Doro (*restraining him*). No, let him go!

Diego. Are you crazy, man? This will compromise you for good!

Doro. I don't care a damn!

Diego (*breaking away from him*). But you're crazy, I say! Let me go! *(He dashes out of the room in an effort to overtake Francesco Savio.)*

Doro (*calling after him*). Mind your own business, Diego! *(Diego, however, does not stop.)*

Doro (*begins walking up and down the room, muttering furiously to himself).* Huh! That's a good one! And he has the impudence to come and tell me that I was right! . . . The clown! After making it look to everybody as though . . . *(At this point the butler hurries in in some alarm with a visiting card in his hand.)*

Filippo. May I come in, sir?

Doro. Well, what's the matter?

Filippo. A lady calling, sir.

Doro. A lady?

Filippo. Here's her card. *(He holds out a visiting card.)*

Doro *(in great agitation after reading the name on the card).* Where . . . where is she?

Filippo. She is in the hall, sir, waiting.

Doro (*he looks around him in perplexity. Finally, and with a great effort to conceal his anxiety and confusion*). Has mamma gone out?

Filippo. Yes, sir, she left a moment ago!

Doro. Show the lady in! Show her in here! (*Filippo withdraws. Doro advances toward the drawing-room to*

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receive the visitor. He is standing under the central arch between the two columns when Filippo reappears, introducing Delia Morello. She is soberly but elegantly costumed, and wears a thick veil. Filippo withdraws, bowing.)

Doro. You? Delia? Here?

Delia. I came to thank you. Oh, can I ever tell you how grateful I am, my good, kind, friend!

Doro. Please, please, don't say that!

Delia. Yes! I must say just that! (*Doro has extended his hand. Delia bends over as though to kiss it.*) I must thank you! Thank you, indeed!

Doro. But no . . . no . . . please! . . . I, rather, should warn you that . . .

Delia. Thank you for the kindness . . . the great kindness you did me!

Doro. But what kindness? I simply said . . .

Delia. No! Oh, I see! . . . You thought I was thanking you for having stood up for me? Not at all! What do I care whether people accuse me or defend me? I am my own judge, and my own tormentor! My gratitude, rather, is for what you thought and felt inside yourself . . . and not because you took the trouble to express it in the presence of other people.

Doro (*in great bewilderment*). I thought . . . yes . . . what . . . knowing the facts as I did . . . it seemed to me . . . what it seemed to me was just to think.

Delia. Just or unjust . . . what do I care? The fact is that what you said of me suddenly made me see myself . . . you understand . . . see myself—the moment I heard it!

Doro (*in growing bewilderment, but striving to appear indifferent*). Ah, so then . . . so then . . . I guessed right?

Delia. As right as though you had lived my life to the

bottom . . . but understanding me in a way I never understood myself! Never! Never! And a great shudder went over me! . . . I cried . . . Yes! Yes! . . . "That's just the way I am! That's just the way I am!" . . . And you can't imagine with what joy and with what anguish I recognized myself, saw myself . . . in all the things you found to say of me!

Doro. I am happy . . . happy . . . most happy . . . happy because it all seemed to me so clear at the time, when in fact I did discover those things—without reflection . . . you understand . . . as though by an inspiration coming to me directly from you. Later on, I confess, I did not feel the same way.

Delia. Ah! Later on—you changed?

Doro. Yes. But if now you tell me that you recognize yourself in what I said of you . . . if you tell me that I was right . . .

Delia. I have been living all day on that inspiration of yours—inspiration you may well call it. What I don't understand is how you could see through me so easily, and so clearly—you who scarcely know me, after all. Whereas I . . . well . . . it's terrible . . . I struggle and struggle, suffering all the while—I don't know—as though—as though I were not quite myself, as though I were constantly groping around to find myself . . . to understand the woman that I really am, to ask her what she really wants, why she is suffering so, and what I ought to do to tame her, pacify her, give her a little peace . . .

Doro. That's it . . . a little peace, a little quiet! That's what you need!

Delia. I have him constantly before my eyes . . . just as I saw him there at my feet . . . pale . . . lifeless . . . a dead thing! It all came over me in a flash! I felt myself —I don't know—dying—and I bent over to look at him . . .

trying to grasp from the abyss of that instant the eternity of the sudden death I could see before my eyes, there, in his face, a face which in a second had lost consciousness of everything . . . Ah, I knew . . . I alone knew . . . the life there had been in that poor body which had destroyed itself for me, for me who am nothing . . . nothing. Ah! I was quite mad! Imagine the state I must be in at present!

Doro. But quiet, now! Please, be calm!

Delia. Oh, I am calm enough . . . But see . . . when I try to be calm . . . well . . . it's this way . . . I'm stunned, stunned, that's it! All feeling seems to leave me! Just that . . . just that! I pinch myself, but I don't feel it! My hands . . . I look at them, and they don't seem to be mine! And then all the things I have to do—I don't know why I have to do them—I open my handbag and take out my mirror and I am horror-stricken at the pallor and at the coldness that has come over me! Well . . . you can't imagine the impression I get, there, in the circle of that mirror, of my painted lips and my painted eyes! . . .

Doro. That's because you don't see yourself as others see you.

Delia. So you say that, too? Must I actually hate—hate as my enemies—all the people I have anything to do with—that they may help me to understand myself?

Doro. Why no . . . why should you?

Delia. Why, I see them walk in front of me and they seem—well—to be dazzled by my eyes, by my lips, by my beauty, in short; but no one cares for me . . . no one cares for what most concerns me.

Doro. Your real self, that is! . . .

Delia. So then I punish them in the things they really desire. Those desires disgust me, but first I do my best to fan them, make them worse in order to get my revenge . . . and that revenge I get by giving myself away, suddenly, capri-

ciously, to the person whom they would have least expected to win me! (*Doro nods with a suggestion of reproach.*) I do that, I suppose, to show them my contempt for the things they most highly prize in me. (*Again Doro nods.*) Have I harmed myself? Always . . . always! But better worthless men like that . . . worthless men who have no pretensions, and who know how little they amount to . . . people who bore you, perhaps, but who do not disappoint you . . . and who may even have their good points, too—certain fresh and honest qualities which are the more delightful because you least expect to find them, just there.

Doro (*surprised*). Well, that was almost exactly what I said! Almost exactly!

Delia (*with great emotion*). Yes! Yes!

Doro. That was the way I explained certain incomprehensible acts of yours! . . .

Delia. Incomprehensible? Yes . . . caprices . . . impulses of the moment . . . leaps into space with my eyes closed! . . . (*She stands there for a moment, gazing vacantly into void, as though fascinated by some distant vision.*) Just imagine . . . (*And then she continues as though speaking to herself.*) . . . somersaults you might call them . . . yes . . . somersaults . . . (*falling into her abstraction again*). There was a little girl, and the gypsies taught her to turn somersaults . . . handsprings . . . wheeling hand over hand on a green lawn near my house in the country when I was a child! . . . (*Still in her abstraction.*) Was I ever a child? (*A memory of the way her mother used to call her comes into her mind and she shouts:*) "Lilly dear! Lilly dear! Lilli! Lilli!" Hahah! Hahah! She was afraid of those gypsies, poor, dear mamma! She was afraid they would suddenly break camp and carry me off. (*Comes to herself again.*) The gypsies never carried me off. I learned to turn handsprings and somersaults all by myself after I had come away from

the country here to town . . . here, where everything is false, fictitious . . . falser and more fictitious every day. And we can't shake it off; because when we try to get back to simplicity again . . . make ourselves true and honest again, our very honesty and our very simplicity seem false and counterfeit! It all seems that way because it is . . . because it is false and counterfeit! Haha! Truth? What is truth? . . . Nothing is true! I should like to see with my eyes, or hear with my ears, or feel with my fingers, one thing . . . just one thing . . . that is true . . . really true . . . in me!

Doro. There is one thing in you that I imagine is true . . . the goodness and kindness that you have at bottom—a goodness and a kindness hidden from other people, and perhaps even from yourself—a goodness, at any rate, that I tried, in the quarrel yesterday, to make other people see.

Delia. Yes! Yes! And I'm very grateful! Yes! Goodness . . . you call me "good"—but a goodness so complicated, so complex that when you tried to make people understand it, when you tried to make it look simple and clear, they grew angry at you and laughed at you. . . . But you have explained it, even to me. . . . Yes, people disliked me, just as you say. I was kept at a distance by everybody—there, at Capri. I'm sure that some of them thought I was a spy! But what a discovery I made there, Doro. . . . Love for humanity! Do you know what it means to love humanity? It means just this: when you say you are in love with humanity, you are satisfied with yourself! When a person is satisfied with himself . . . happy with himself . . . he loves humanity! Full of just such love, and happy . . . oh, so happy *he* must have been when *he* came to Capri, after the last exhibition of his paintings at Naples!

Doro. Giorgio Salvi, you mean?

Delia. He had been working on some Neapolitan stud-

ies, as he called them, and he found me when he was in just that state of mind.

Doro. There you are! Just as I said! All taken up with his own art . . . and as for feelings! . . . no feelings for anything except for his art!

Delia. Color . . . ah, color . . . everything was color with him! Feeling with him was nothing but color!

Doro. So he asked you to sit for a portrait? . . .

Delia. In the beginning . . . yes! But later on . . . he had a way of his own in asking for anything he wanted—so funny—petulant, almost impudent—he was like a spoiled child! So I became his model! . . . It was very, very true what you said: nothing is more irritating than to be held aloof, excluded from a joy which . . .

Doro. . . . which is living, present, before us, around us, and the reason for which we can neither discover nor define! . . .

Delia. Exactly! It was a joy . . . well, a pure joy, but only for his *eyes* . . . and it proved to me that, after all, at bottom he saw in me . . . he prized in me . . . only my body! My body was the only thing he wanted from me! Oh, don't misunderstand me! Not as other men wanted me —out of a low desire—oh no!

Doro. But that, in the long run, could only have irritated you the more.

Delia. Precisely! Because if I was disgusted, nauseated, when other men failed to help me in my own spiritual uncertainties and troubles, my disgust at a man who also wanted my body and nothing else—but only to get from me a purely . . . a purely . . .

Doro. . . . ideal joy . . .

Delia. . . . and a joy exclusively his own . . .

Doro. . . . must have been all the stronger precisely because every tangible motive for anger was lacking . . .

Delia. . . . and it was impossible for me to have the satisfaction of that vengeance which at least I was able to inflict upon other men by suddenly giving myself to someone else! Oh, for a woman I assure you, an angel is always more irritating than a beast!

Doro (*triumphantly*). Well! Well! Well! I used those very words! Absolutely! Those very words!

Delia. Yes, but you forget—I am only repeating them, after you, just as they were reported to me. You see, they suddenly made so many things clear to me!

Doro. Why, yes . . . revealing a real reason . . .

Delia. . . . for what I did! Yes . . . yes . . . it's true: to get my revenge on him, I tried to bring my body gradually to life before him so that it should no longer exist merely for the delight of his eyes . . .

Doro. . . . and later, when you saw that he had become your slave as so many others had been, then, to taste your vengeance to the full, you forbade him any other joy than the one with which, up to that time, he had been content . . .

Delia. Since that was all he had ever asked for . . . since that was the only one truly worthy of him! . . .

Doro. That's enough! I understand! I understand! In that way your vengeance was complete! You never wanted him to marry you, did you? In fact, you were determined that he shouldn't?

Delia. Yes! Yes! For a long time I struggled . . . I did my best to dissuade him . . . But in the end, driven to a fury, beside himself . . . exasperated beyond endurance by my obstinate refusals, he threatened to do something rash . . . It was then that I decided to go away . . . disappear forever!

Doro. And then it was that you imposed upon him conditions which you knew would be terribly hard for him! . . . You imposed them deliberately upon him! . . .

Delia. Deliberately . . . yes . . . on purpose!

Doro. The condition that he would introduce you formally, as his fiancée, to his mother and to his sister! . . .

Delia. Yes . . . yes . . . because they were proud and haughty women, of the most inaccessible aristocracy—not my kind at all—and he was proud of their pride and jealous of their high position. Yes, I did it deliberately, so that he would say no! Oh, how he used to talk of his little sister! . . .

Doro. Exactly! Just as I contended, then! Tell me the truth now . . . when Rocca, his sister's fiancé . . .

Delia (*horror-stricken*). Oh, no, no! Don't speak of him . . . don't speak of him, please!

Doro. But here we would have the real proof of the position I maintained! You must tell me! You must tell me that what I said is true!

Delia. Yes, I did go away with him! I did spend a night with him . . . because I was desperate . . . desperate . . . unable to see any other means of escape!

Doro. Exactly! Exactly!

Delia. And under such circumstances that Giorgio would be sure to find us together—yes—find me with Rocca and thus refuse to go on with our marriage . . . which would have been the ruin of him—utter unhappiness—and the ruin of me also. I would have been wretched, too.

Doro (*triumphantly*). Exactly! Absolutely what I said! So I defended you—and that fool there saying I was wrong—saying that your refusals of Giorgio . . . all your struggles, all your threats . . . your attempt to run away . . . were just part of a cheap game you were playing to lead him on.

Delia (*alarmed*). He said that? . . .

Doro. Yes! Treachery premeditated . . . . carefully thought out . . . aiming to reduce Salvi to utter despair,

after you had made him fall in love with you, after you had led him on!

Delia (*alarmed*). I . . . led him on . . . I?

Doro. Exactly! And the more desperate he got, the more you held out in order to gain many many things which he would never have granted you otherwise.

Delia (*more and more alarmed and gradually losing her confidence again.*) What things?

Doro. Well, first of all, an introduction to his mother and to his sister, and to the latter's fiancé, social recognition from the three of them!

Delia. Ah! And he didn't see that I hoped to find in Giorgio's refusal to give me those introductions a pretext for breaking off my engagement to him?

Doro. No . . . no! He claimed you had another scheme in that!

Delia (*in utter desperation*). What scheme?

Doro. He said you wanted to parade your victory in public, before all society, by being seen in the presence of that little sister of his . . . you a model of the studios . . . you an actress . . . you, an adventuress! . . .

Delia (*stabbed to the heart*). Oh, that is what he said? (*She stands there looking blankly into space, overwhelmed.*)

Doro. That is exactly what he said! And furthermore, he said that when the introduction you had insisted upon was postponed from day to day, you discovered that the postponement was due to the flat refusal of Rocca, the sister's fiancé, to meet you!

Delia. And so to show my power over Rocca . . . to humiliate him . . . to get even with him! . . . That's the idea, isn't it?

Doro. Yes . . . you sank your claws into Rocca, twisting him around your finger like a blade of grass, quite forgetting Salvi, meantime—just for the pleasure of showing

that sister of his and her mother, what the pride and respectability of the pillars of public morals amounted to! (*For a time Delia stands in silence her eyes fixed apparently upon something in distant space. Finally she covers her face with both her hands and remains in that attitude for some seconds. Doro considers her, in perplexity and surprise. Then he asks:* What's the matter? (*Delia still keeps her hands to her face, but finally she lowers them and is again seen staring with the same blank expression into space. Then, opening her two arms in a gesture of discouragement.*)

Delia. And who knows! Who knows! Who knows that those weren't the reasons?

Doro (*startled*). Weren't the reasons? . . . What do you mean? If they were . . . (*At this moment Donna Livia appears in the brightly lighted drawing-room and comes forward on the stage in great agitation, calling, before she reaches the parlor:*)

Donna Livia. Doro! Doro!

Doro (*leaping to his feet in alarm at the sound of his mother's voice*). My mother is coming!

Donna Livia (*rushing into the room*). Doro! Is this true? I've been told that the trouble last evening is to result in a duel!

Doro. Duel? Who ever said such a thing?

Donna Livia (*noticing Delia and turning disdainfully upon her*). Ah! Indeed! So I find this woman in my own house!

Doro (*firmly, and stressing the important words*). Yes, in your house! In *your* house, mamma! You call it *your* house!

Delia. Oh, but I'm going away . . . I'm going away! But don't be alarmed, Signora! There will be no duel . . . there will be no duel! I assure you, Signora! Don't worry on that account! I will prevent it . . . I will find a way to

prevent it! . . . (*With a sob, she starts rapidly for the other room.*)

Doro (*following after her and calling*). Signora, don't you dare! Please, Signora, don't try to interfere! (*Delia goes out.*)

Donna Livia (*trying to stop Doro and almost in a* scream). So it's true then?

Doro (*turning and answering vehemently*). True? What is true? That I'm going to fight a duel? Perhaps! And why? For something that no one understands . . . . neither he, nor I, nor the woman herself . . . ah . . . nor the woman herself! . . .

Curtain.

The curtain falls, but almost immediately rises again, uncovering a section of the theatre lobby opening on the orchestra. Spectators, one by one, are seen coming out of the main hall of the theatre, at the end of the first act. It may be taken for granted that other spectators are similarly entering the corridors that lie invisible to right and left. In fact, newcomers keep appearing from other parts of the lobby from time to time.

This scene in the lobby—spectators coming out of a theatre—will show what was first presented on the stage as life itself to be a fiction of art; and the substance of the comedy will accordingly be pushed back, as it were, into a secondary plane of actuality or reality. But later on, toward the end of this interlude, the scene in the lobby will, in its turn, be expelled from the foreground, when it transpires that the comedy which has been witnessed on the stage is a "comedy with a key"—a comedy, that is, based upon an episode in real life, an episode, moreover, with which the newspapers have been recently dealing as a feature: the famous triangular

situation between a certain Moreno woman (whom everybody recognizes in the Delia Morello of the comedy): a certain Baron Nuti, and the sculptor, Giacomo La Vela (who has committed suicide). The Moreno woman and Baron Nuti are present in the theatre among the spectators. Their appearance, therefore, suddenly and violently establishes a plane of reality still closer to real life, leaving the spectators who are discussing the fictitious reality of the staged play on a plane midway between. In the interlude at the end of the second act these three planes of reality will come into conflict with one another, as the participants in the drama of real life attack the participants in the comedy, the spectators, meantime, trying to interfere. Under such circumstances it need not be observed, a comedy cannot go on.

In the production of this first interlude the greatest naturalness, volubility, and vivacity are necessary. The presupposition is that at the end of every act of these unintelligible, implausible, paradoxical—and what not—comedies of Pirandello, arguments and conflicts are bound to occur. The defenders of Pirandello should show toward his uncompromising antagonists a smiling humility of countenance which has the effect of exasperating hostilities rather than the contrary.

Various groups of people form in the lobby. Individuals may be seen going from one group to the other in quest of light. Comic effects should be derived from their changes of opinion according to the group they hit upon. A few placid individuals are smoking unconcernedly, and the way they smoke will show their boredom, if they are bored, or their doubts, if they are in doubt; because smoking, like all vices that become habitual, has this sad shortcoming: that it eventually fails to satisfy, by itself, but takes its flavor from the moment in which it is indulged and from the state of mind in which it is indulged. It follows that even people who dislike Piran-

dello's plays may console themselves with a good cigar, if they choose, on occasion.

Conspicuous in the crowd in the lobby, the uniforms of two policemen (carabiniéri) may be seen. An usher or two and a ticket-taker; two or three maids dressed in black with white aprons. A newsboy intrudes from the street, calling his headlines. In the groups, arguing and gesticulating here and there, a few women may be observed. Some of them also are smoking (but not with the author's approval); others may be seen going in and out of the doors to the boxes, where they are visiting friends.

The five dramatic critics are naturally much in evidence. They keep away from each other at first, and if anyone questions them they maintain a stolid silence (they have to, you see, to live up to a reputation for "reserve" and "balance"). Gradually, however, they drift together to get a line on each other's "dope." Individuals who recognize them edge up as close as possible (without impoliteness) to hear what these celebrities are saying. The interest these people manifest gradually attracts a crowd, whereupon the critics either crawl into their shells or walk away. It is quite possible that here in the lobby some of the critics will say very sharp things about the comedy and its author; though they will have only praise for both in the articles they write for their papers the next day. A profession is one thing, while the man who professes it is quite another: a critic may have plenty of reasons for sacrificing as a writer his sincerity as a man—granted, of course, that such sacrifice be possible, granted, I mean to say, that he have some sincerity to sacrifice. So with the spectators. Many of those who here appear as bitter critics of the play clapped it uproariously in the theatre at the end of the first act.

It is hardly worth while writing out the dialogue of this choral interlude. People say much the same things and ex-

press much the same judgments about all plays and all authors—which, and who, are "good," "bad," "well constructed," "badly constructed," "obscure," "absurd," "improbable," "paradoxical," "cerebral—all from the brain," and so on. Nevertheless, we must here note down such exchanges as are indispensable between the actors who are actors for the moment in this interlude; though the stage manager is intentionally left a free hand to introduce anything he can devise to keep the lobby in a state of lively and confused animation.

At first: monosyllables, exclamations, grunts, brief questions and answers, from phlegmatic spectators who make for the lobby at the earliest possible moment (those really interested in the play are still inside witnessing or fomenting the uproar following on the first act).

Two People (*coming out in a hurry*). I'll just go upstairs and look for him.

Number eight, second row, balcony. But be sure you find him, eh?

Don't worry, I'll get him all right. (*The second starts away to the Left.*)

A Man (*meeting him*). Hello! So you managed to get in?

The Second of the First Two. As you see. However, I'll be back in a moment. I'm just going upstairs. (*Other spectators come on from the Left where a great deal of talking can be heard. Others are appearing through the main and side entrances.*)

Somebody (*anybody*). Good house tonight!

Another. Full up!

A Third. See them anywhere?

A Fourth. I don't think they got past the box-office; but they were beauts!

(*In the general confusion exchanges of greetings:* "Good evening!" "Good evening!"—*Smatterings of light talk; one word comments on the play:* "Some show!" "Bunk!" *etc., etc. A few introductions. A newsboy enters from the street calling his papers. A man buys one. An eruption from the theatre—a number of spectators favorable to the author. Enthusiastic, eager, eyes gleaming, they crowd together in a group and begin exchanging first impressions. Later they scatter in various directions, approaching this or that hostile circle, defending their author and his comedy now good-humoredly, now bad-humoredly, now with irony. Their adversaries have also been organizing, meantime.*

Friends of Pirandello.

Here we are! Here! This way!
I'll be right there!
All together now, if there's trouble!
A great success, it seems to me!
Splendid! Splendid!
Seems to have gotten away with it!
That last scene with the woman . . . !
Real acting, I say!
Those fellows both changed their minds!
The whole act's a ripper!

Opponents.

His usual line of nonsense!
What does he think we are, fools?
Pirandello's in the same old rut!
You can't make head or tail to the thing!
What's it all mean?
That bird's getting away with murder!
Two dollars, to listen to that stuff!
(*One of the adversaries, calling to the group of Pirandello's friends.*) But you fellows, you understand it all, eh?

Another of the Adversaries. Of course they do. They're a bunch of wise ones, all right!

One of Pirandello's Friends (*approaching*). You said that for my benefit?

The First of the Two Adversaries. No, I didn't mean you—I meant him. (*And he points to another man.*)

The Latter (*advancing*). You meant that for me?

Adversary. Yes, I meant it for you! I meant it for you! You wouldn't understand "Punch and Judy" if you had it explained to you!

The Man in Question. Yes, but *you* understand, don't you! At least, you understand enough to say it's bunk, don't you?

Voices From Neighboring Groups.

But what is there to understand, anyhow?

Didn't you hear . . . ?

Nobody knows what it's all about!

First it's this, and then it's something else!

First they said one thing, but now they say the opposite!

It's a joke on the audience!

What are those people staring at?

That poor mother dying, eh? . . .

. . . And that carriage on the country road! . . .

And it never gets anywhere! Some flivver!

A Man (*going from one group to another*). So it's a joke on the audience! A joke on the audience! What's it all mean? No one knows what it means! No one can make head or tail to it!

Another Group (*coming into the foreground*).

But it certainly makes you think, eh?

But why is he always harping on this illusion and reality string?

That's not my view of it!

It's just a way of saying things!

Hasn't he expressed it?

Well, expression is art, and art is expression!

But damned if I can see what he's expressed!

But I saw you clapping . . . yes, you did . . . yes, you did . . . I saw you . . . I saw you! . . .

But a single conception may present different phases, according as you look at it, providing it be a whole conception of life.

Conception be damned! Can you tell me what the conception in this first act is?

Yes, but supposing it didn't pretend to have any meaning! . . .

The Same Man (*going to another group*). Yes! Exactly! I see! It isn't supposed to have any meaning! Clever, eh? Clever!

A Third Group (*gathering around the critics*). Nonsense! Just plain damn nonsense! But you critics—you understand the dra-ama! Pray enlighten us. What's it all mean?

First Critic. The construction . . . not bad . . . not bad. Of course one or two places could be left out . . .

One of the Spectators. What was the point in all that high-brow stuff about conscience?

A Second Critic. But gentlemen, gentlemen, you have seen only the first act! . . .

Third Critic. But, honest now . . . is it permissible, I ask you, to play with character that way? There ought to be a law against it . . . and an act without either head or tail? Here we have a drama based, almost casually, you might say, on a discussion that is not even held on the stage! . . .

Fourth Critic. But the discussion is about the play itself. It is the play itself!

Second Critic. And the play gets going at last when the woman comes on!

Third Critic. But why not give us the play then, and have done with it?

A Friend of Pirandello. But that woman is well conceived!

One of the Adversaries. It isn't so much the character, though. It's the girl who takes the part. (*He will name the actress doing Delia Morello.*)

The Man (*leaving this group and going back to the first one*). The drama gets going finally, when the woman comes on! She is well conceived, there's no denying that! Everybody is saying so!

A Man in the First Group (*answering angrily*). Oh, give us a rest! This play is just one jumble of words!

Another Man (*vehemently*). He took the plot out of the newspapers! Sheer impudence!

Third (*just as vehemently*). One trick after another! Just word play! All on the surface!

The Man (*going from the first to the second group*). Yes, he got the plot from the newspapers! There's no denying it! Everybody says so!

Fourth Critic (*speaking to the third*). But what characters, in the name of heaven! Where do you find people like that in life?

Third Critic. That's a great idea! People can talk, can't they, and the moment they talk . . . !

Fourth Critic. Talk? Exactly! Talk! And you can do what you want when you're playing with words!

Fifth Critic. But I ask you now, if the theatre is art! . . .

One of the Adversaries. Art . . . exactly . . . poetry . . . poetry!

Fifth Critic. But why not controversy? Admirable,

that, I grant you. Conflict . . . the shock of opposite opinions . . . just that!

One of the Friends of Pirandello. But you people are making the controversy, it seems to me. I didn't notice so much of it on the stage!

One of the Adversaries. Yes . . . here we have a great author, haven't we? At least you say so!

The Old Author (*who never had a play produced*). So far as I am concerned, if you like this play, you're welcome! What I think—you know already!

Voices. No! Tell us! Tell us! What do you think? Let's have it!

Old Author. Oh, little tricks of the mind . . . intellectual altogether, gentlemen . . . little problems . . . what shall I say—little problems of philosophy, as philosophy is studied by men who are not philosophers! . . .

Fourth Critic. I don't agree! I don't agree!

Old Author (*raising his voice*). But no great travail of the spirit, as we say! Nothing really straightforward and convincing.

Fourth Critic. Yes, we all know what you call straightforward and convincing! . . .

A Literary Man (*who never writes*). If you ask me, the most objectionable thing about the play is . . . well . . . it's the disagreeableness of the situation itself!

Second Critic. Why, no! This time it seems to me we have an atmosphere much more wholesome than usual.

Literary Man. But no real artistic urge! Why anybody could write like that!

Fourth Critic. For my part, not having seen the whole play as yet, I shouldn't risk a final judgment; but I think there is going to be something to it. It's as though you were looking into a looking-glass that had gone crazy somehow and . . .

(*On the left at this moment a violent clamor is heard. Screams. Shouts.*) "Lunatic! Fraud! Fraud! Lunatic! Call the ambulance!" (*People all look in that direction.*) What's going on in there?

The Bad-Humored Spectator. Can't a fellow ever come to see a play of this fellow Pirandello without getting mixed up in a scrap?

Good-Humored Spectator. Let's hope there'll be no heads broken.

One of the Friends of Pirandello. If you want to sleep, why don't you stick to the other plays? With them you can just lean back in your seat and take what is sent you across the footlights. But with a comedy of Pirandello's you have to be on your pins. You sit up straight and dig your finger nails into the arms of your chair as though you were going to be knocked down by what the author has to say! You hear a word . . . any word at all . . . "chair" for instance! Now with most people that would mean "chair," but with Pirandello you say "A chair? . . . No sir! He isn't going to get away with that! I'm going to find out what's under the chair!"

One of the Adversaries. Yes, yes! That's right! Pirandello gives you everything except a little sentiment! But not a bit of sentiment!

Other Adversaries. That's it! That's it! Not a bit of sentiment . . . and you've got to have sentiment!

One of Pirandello's Friends. If you want sentiment go and find it under the chair that fellow is talking about.

The Adversaries. But let us have done with these spasms, this nihilism . . . this delight he takes in denying everything! We're tired of tearing down. Let us begin to build up!

First of Pirandello's Friends (*vehemently*). Who is tearing anything down? You people are the Bolshevists!

One of the Adversaries (*storming back at him*). We, tearing down? We never denied that reality exists!

First of Pirandello's Friends. But who denies your reality, if you never succeeded in creating one?

A Second Friend. You deny the truth as other people see it, you claim that there is only one way of looking at things.

First Friend. The way you look at them yourself, today!

Second Friend. Forgetting how you looked at them yesterday!

First Friend. Because you . . . you people get your reality from others—it's a convention . . . a mere convention . . . an empty word . . . any word at all: mountain, tree, stream. You think that reality is something fixed, something definite, and you feel as though you were being cheated if someone comes along and shows you that it was all an illusion on your part. Idiots! This comedy tells you that everyone must build a foundation for himself under his own feet, bit by bit, step by step, if he is to advance. You must kick aside a reality that does not belong to you, for the simple reason that you have not made it for yourselves, but are using it as parasites—yes, gentlemen, as parasites—mourning that old-fashioned sentimentality of yours that we've driven from the stage at last, thank God!

Baron Nuti (*pale, disheveled, in a rage, comes in from the Left accompanied by two other spectators who are trying to restrain him*). And something else, it seems to me, this comedy teaches, my dear sir! It teaches you to malign the dead and to slander the living!

One of the Men With Him (*seizing him by an arm and trying to drag him away*). But please . . . no . . . please . . . come away . . . come away!

The Other Man With Him (*talking at the same*

time). Yes . . . hush . . . hush! Come . . . come . . . please come! Come!

Baron Nuti (*as he is being dragged off to the left, turns and shouts back*). To malign the dead and to slander the living!

Voices (*amid general surprise*).

What's the matter? Who's that man?

Who's that man?

What a face!

Has he gone crazy?

What's the matter?

Who is he?

Spectator From the Social Set. It's Baron Nuti.

Voices.

Baron Nuti? Who is Baron Nuti?

Why did he say what he said?

Spectator From the Social Set. But don't you people understand that there is a key to this comedy?

One of the Critics. A key? What do you mean . . . a key?

Spectator From the Social Set. Why yes! This comedy is based on the Moreno affair! Almost word for word! The author has taken it from real life!

Voices.

The Moreno case?

The Moreno woman?

Who is she?

Who is she?

Why, she's that actress that was in Germany for so long!

She's well known in Turin!

Ah, yes, she was mixed up in the suicide of that sculptor named La Vela some months ago!

What do you think of that?

And Pirandello . . . is Pirandello getting so low that he makes comedies on society gossip?

Looks that way . . . looks that way!

And it's not the first time, you know!

But there's nothing wrong in making comedy out of the day's gossip, is there?

No, unless, as that man just said, you use your comedy to malign the dead and slander the living.

But Nuti . . . who is Nuti?

Spectator From the Social Set. He is the other fellow in the triangle! La Vela killed himself on Nuti's account! Nuti was to marry La Vela's sister!

One of the Critics. And he spent the night with the Moreno woman—the night before her marriage to La Vela?

Voices From the Hostile Group. The same situation to a T! It's a crime . . . a downright crime!

Other Voices From the Same Group. And the actors in the real drama have been here in the theatre?

A Third (*calling attention to Nuti off the stage, to the Left*). There he is . . . there he is!

The Spectator From the Social Set. The Moreno woman has a seat in a box upstairs. She recognized herself immediately in the comedy. They'd better watch out for her! She's a terror when she gets started! She bit her handkerchief to shreds during the first act! She'll be making a noise, you'll see! She'll turn the place upside down!

Voices.

Serve them right if she did!

The idea of putting a woman in a pillory like that!

Her own case right before her eyes on the stage, and that Nuti fellow, too!

He had murder in his eye!

There's going to be trouble here . . . there's going to be trouble!

(*A bell rings, announcing the beginning of the second act.*)

There's the bell . . . there's the bell!
The curtain's going up!
Let's hurry! We mustn't miss anything!

(*There is a general movement toward the entrances to the theatre proper. Exclamations, comments, murmurings continue as the news spreads. Three individuals from the group favorable to Pirandello bring up the rear, so that they are present on the stage—that is to say, in the theatre lobby, now virtually cleared of people—when the Moreno woman appears from the Left. She has come tearing down from her box upstairs despite the efforts of three male friends who are trying to get her out of the theatre to prevent trouble. The ticket takers at the theatre doors are at first caught by surprise; but then they do their best to quiet the disturbance so that the play inside will not be interrupted. The three partisans of Pirandello stand aside listening in amazement and consternation.*)

Signora Moreno. No . . . no! I will! I will! Let me alone . . . let me alone!

One of Her Friends. But it's madness . . . it's sheer madness! What can you do about it?

Signora Moreno. I am going behind the scenes!

A Second of Her Friends. What can you do in there? Have you lost your mind?

Signora Moreno. Let me alone! Let me alone!

The Third of Her Friends. Now I'll just take you to my car.

Other Two (*in chorus*). Yes, yes, let's all go home! Please, now, come along with us!

Signora Moreno. I won't! I won't! Let go of me! Let go of me! It's a disgrace! It's an insult! And they won't get away with it scot free!

The First Friend. But what's the idea? What's the idea? . . . On the stage . . . in front of everybody there?

Signora Moreno. Let go of me, I tell you! Let go of me! Yes, there on the stage, in front of everybody!

Second Friend. Ah, no, not a bit of it! Not a bit of it! We won't let you make a show of yourself like that!

Signora Moreno. Let go of me, won't you? I'm going in there behind the scenes. . . .

Third Friend. But the actors are out on the stage again!

First Friend. The second act has begun!

Signora Moreno (*suddenly growing calmer*). Ah, they have begun again? I must hear what they have to say! I'm going back! (*She starts off toward the Left again.*)

Her Friends (*all together*). No! No! Please, let's go away! Do as we say! Please! Please! Let's go home!

Signora Moreno (*virtually dragging them after her*). No! I'm going back in again! I want to see the rest of it! I will! I will!

One of the Friends (*as they withdraw to the Left*). But why torment yourself any further?

One of the Ticket Takers (*addressing the three partisans of Pirandello*). What's the matter with those people? Gone nutty? . . .

The First of the Partisans (*to the other two*). Did you understand? Did you understand?

The Second. It's the Moreno woman!

The Third. But say, is Pirandello in the theatre?

The First. He may be. I think I'll just step inside and advise him to run, while the running is good. This evening there's going to be a rumpus, and no mistake.

Curtain.

ACT II

The house of Francesco Savio the morning after.

A sort of lounge opening on a wide veranda, where Savio habitually practices fencing. On the veranda, accordingly, as we view it through the large windows which occupy almost all the rear wall of the room, there are one or two stools, a long bench for spectators, fencing masks and gloves, chest protectors, sabres, rapiers. A green cloth curtain hangs on the inside of the window and may be run back and forth on rings so as to cut off the view of the veranda and give a little privacy to the room. A similar curtain, stretched between the posts on the veranda, is already drawn, cutting off the veranda from the garden which is supposed to lie beyond, and of which a glimpse will be had at certain moments as some of the characters draw the curtain aside to go down the steps into the garden.

The room is furnished with green wicker furniture—two chairs, a table, a stand, two divans. There must be a door to the right, in addition to one opening upon the veranda, and a small window to the left.

As the curtain rises, Francesco Savio and the fencing master, with masks, protectors, and gloves on, are fencing on the veranda. Prestino and two other friends stand looking on.

THE FENCING MASTER. Eh-eh-eh! Look out! Look out! (*He lunges and Francesco parries.*) Good! No . . . let's try that again! Eh-eh-eh-eh! (*They cross their rapiers, the fencing master lunges, and Francesco parries as before.*) Well done! Well done! Now look out . . . look out!

In position! Now attack . . . now attack! That feint is no good! That feint is no good! It leaves you open over here! This way . . . see? There you are! All right! Alt! (*They lower their rapiers. The practice bout is over.*) Keep at it that way and you'll come through all right! (*They take off their masks.*)

Francesco. Yes! I'm sure I will! But I think I have had enough! Thanks, maestro! (*He shakes hands with the fencing master.*)

Prestino. Yes, better not keep it up too long!

Fencing Master (*taking off his glove and then the protector*). But I'll tell you one thing . . . you're not going to find Palegari easy! He's a tough customer when he attacks!

One of the Two Friends. And he parries splendidly! Don't give him a chance at you!

The Second. He's as quick as a flash!

Francesco. Yes, I knew that (*taking off his glove and protector*).

The First of His Friends. You keep your eye peeled to the right!

Fencing Master. The main point is to keep your iron on his.

Francesco. I understand . . . I understand!

The Second Friend. The straight lunge works best against Doro.

First Friend. Not a bit of it! You just meet his rush . . . just meet his rush! You take it from me . . . let him alone and he'll beat himself! Keep a stiff arm and he'll spit himself on your weapon!

Fencing Master. Meantime, I must congratulate you . . . you have an air-tight defense!

Prestino. Follow my advice and don't do any attacking! Keep him coming on and you'll get a chance at him

sooner or later! Meantime I propose a round of drinks to your good luck! (*He comes forward into the room with the others.*)

Francesco. Yes, yes, right you are! (*He pushes a button in the wall; then turning to the fencing master*): And you, maestro, what'll you have?

The Fencing Master. Nothing for me—I never drink in the forenoon.

Francesco. I have some first rate beer.

Prestino. That's the talk! A mug of beer!

First of the Two Friends. Same here! (*The butler appears from the door to the Right.*)

Francesco. Bring in four or five bottles of beer right away. (*The butler goes out, returning almost immediately, however, with bottles and glasses on a tray. He pours the beer, passes it around and withdraws again.*)

First Friend. This will be the craziest duel on record. Your name will go down in history, Francesco.

Second Friend. It certainly will. I doubt whether two men ever cut themselves up before, each for the privilege of saying that the other one was right.

Prestino. But it's all very natural, however.

First Friend. Natural? What is there natural about it?

Prestino. Why, here the two of them were on opposite sides of the same question. They both changed their minds at the same time, each coming around to the view of the other. Naturally, they collided in the process.

Fencing Master. Of course, if while the one who was first attacking has now passed to the defense and fights just as fiercely as before, each of them, meantime, using the arguments of the other . . .

First Friend. Are you sure of that?

Francesco. I assure you I went to his house with the most sincere and cordial intentions.

First Friend. And not because you felt—

Francesco. No, there is no question of pride at all!

First Friend. That isn't what I was going to say. It's not because you felt you had gone a bit too far in publicly assailing the Morello woman so bitterly?

Francesco. Not at all . . . not at all! Why . . . I . . .

First Friend. Wait! Let me finish. I was going to say: without taking account of a fact that was perfectly obvious to everybody that evening?

Second Friend. That he was defending the woman because he was in love with her?

Francesco. Not at all . . . not at all! It was because I had not been thinking of any of those things that all the trouble has arisen . We must look like two blamed fools! This is what I get for letting myself go, for being quite spontaneous and frank for once in my life! What a nuisance! I had planned on a quiet little visit to my sister and her husband in the country day after tomorrow.

Prestino. Nevertheless, you had had a rather heated argument the evening before.

Francesco. But—as I tell you again—without thinking of anything but the merits of the case, and without dreaming that he had any secret passion for the woman!

Second Friend. But are you sure he has?

First Friend. Certainly he has!

Prestino. He must have . . . certainly!

Francesco. If I had even remotely suspected such a thing I would not have gone to his house to admit that he was right, certain as I could be that that would make him furious!

The Second Friend (*violently*). I wanted to say this

. . . (*he breaks off short and they all turn to look at him in surprise*).

First Friend (*after waiting a second*). You wanted to say what?

Second Friend. I wanted to say . . . oh, I have forgotten what. (*At this moment Diego Cinci appears in the doorway to the Right.*)

Diego. Am I intruding?

Francesco (*in surprise*). Oh, Diego, you here?

Prestino. Has someone sent you?

Diego (*shrugging his shoulders*). Why should anyone have sent me? Good day, maestro!

Fencing Master. Good day, Cinci! But I must be going. (*Shakes hands with Savio warmly.*) See you tomorrow, Savio . . . and don't stay awake, worrying!

Francesco. Never was cooler in my life, don't fear! Thank you, maestro!

Fencing Master (*bowing to the others*). Gentlemen, I am sorry I can't stay in your good company, but I have an important engagement. (*The others bow to him.*)

Francesco. Look, maestro, if you prefer, you can go out this way. (*He points toward the veranda.*) Just draw the curtain aside and you'll see the stairs. The garden opens on the street.

Fencing Master. Ah, that's a good idea. I'll do that. Once more . . . good morning! (*He withdraws.*)

First Friend (*to Diego*). We were expecting you to be one of Doro Palegari's seconds.

Diego (*shaking his finger in silent negation*). No, I couldn't, you see, I was caught between two fires last evening. Good friends of them both! . . . I had to keep out of it.

The Second Friend. But why have you come here now, then?

Diego. To say that I am delighted that there is going to be a duel! Delighted! Delighted! (*The others laugh.*) And I hope that both get hurt! Not mortally, of course . . . not mortally! A little blood-letting would do them both good! A cut, besides, is something you can see and be sure about! A cut two . . . three . . . five inches long! (*He takes Francesco by the forearm and looks under the sleeve of his coat.*) Let me look at your wrist! All sound! Well, tomorrow morning you're going to have a cut from here to here. It will be something you can look at!

Francesco. A fine consolation! (*The others laugh again.*)

Diego (*speaking up quickly*). But Doro will get his too, let us hope! Doro, too! Let's be quite impartial! I have a surprise for you! You know who came to Palagari's shortly after you went away and I followed you?

Prestino. Delia Morello!

The Second Friend. I suppose she went to thank him for standing up for her!

Diego. Yes, except that when she found out just why you accused her . . . well . . . you know what she did?

Francesco. What did she do?

Diego. She admitted that you were right!

Francesco, Prestino, and the First Friend (*all together*). She did? Really? That's a great idea! And Doro . . . how about him?

Diego. You can imagine how he took it!

Second Friend. He can't have the least idea now why he is going to fight.

Francesco. No, he knows the reason for that! He's going to fight because he insulted me in your presence while I, as I was saying here to my two friends and as you know yourself, had simply gone to him to admit that he was right!

Diego. Now . . .

Francesco. Now what?

Diego. Now that you know that Delia Morello says that you were right . . .

Francesco. Oh, well, if she herself—

Diego. No, my dear boy, no! Hold your ground . . . hold your ground . . . because now Delia Morello is in greater need of a defender than ever, and the job falls to you! You were the first to accuse her!

Prestino. Let's get this straight! Francesco must defend her against herself, now that she's accused herself before the man who at first tried to defend her!

Diego. Exactly! Exactly! And my admiration for her has increased one hundredfold since I found that out! (*Turns suddenly on Francesco.*) You—who are you? (*Then turning to Prestino.*) Who are you? Who am I? Who are we all? Your name is Francesco Savio; mine is Diego Cinci; yours is Prestino. We have of each other reciprocally, and each has of himself, knowledge of some small, insignificant certainty of today, which is not the certainty it was yesterday and will not be the certainty of tomorrow. Francesco, you are living on your income and you are bored!

Francesco. No . . . who told you that?

Diego. You are not bored? Lucky man! I have worn my soul out digging, digging tunnels—to China! (*To Prestino.*) What do you do?

Prestino. Nothing!

Diego. A fine profession! But even people who work, my dear friends—decent, respectable people like me—we are all, all alike! This life that is in us and around us—well examine it as closely as you wish. It is such a continuous, changing thing that if our deepest affections cannot endure against it, imagine what the case with the ideas, the opinions, the judgments which we succeed in forming for

ourselves, must be! All our ideas, in short, change in the restless turmoil we call life. We think we catch a glimpse of a situation! But let us just discover something contrary to what we thought! So-and-so was a white man, eh? Well, at once he's a black man! Our impressions of things change from hour to hour! A word is often sufficient or even just the manner in which it is said—to change our minds completely! And then besides, quite without our knowledge, images of hundreds and hundreds of things are flitting through our minds, suddenly causing our tempers to vary in the strangest way! Here along a road darkening with the approach of evening we are walking, sad, gloomy, despondent. We raise our eyes and we see a cottage still blazing under the setting sun. . . . Or we see a red geranium burning in a stray burst of sunlight. . . . And we change . . . we change . . . we brighten! A wave of tenderness sweeps over us!

Prestino. And where does all that get us?

Diego. Nowhere! Where are we trying to get, for that matter? I was telling you how things are . . . everything vague, indefinite, changing, insubstantial! Finally, to get hold of something solid, to feel the firm ground under your feet, you drop back into the weariness and affliction of your little certainty of today! . . . of that little which you succeed in knowing about yourself . . . your name, let us say . . . how much money you have in your pocket . . . the number of the house on the street where you live . . . your habits . . . your feelings . . . all these things which are customary, established, fixed, in your existence . . . that poor body of yours, for example, which still moves and can follow the flux of life, until its movements, which grow less and less vigorous everyday and less and less supple the older you get, finally cease altogether and—good night!

Francesco. But you were talking of Delia Morello!

Diego. Ah, yes! I was trying to make you understand my great admiration for her; or rather I was trying to make you feel what a joy it is, what a wonderful—though terrible —joy it is, when, caught by the tide of life in one of its moments of tempest, we are able actually to witness the collapse of all those fictitious forms around which our stupid daily life has solidified; and under the dikes, beyond the sea-walls, which we had thrown up to isolate, to create, a definite consciousness for ourselves at all hazards, to build a personality of some kind, we are able to see that bit of tide—which was not wholly unknown to us and which seemed something tangible to us because we had carefully harnessed it to serve our feelings, draining it off into the duties which we had assumed, into the habits which we had created—suddenly break forth in a magnificent, overwhelming flood and turns everything topsy-turvy! Ah, at last!—A whirlwind! A volcanic eruption! An earthquake! A cataclysm!

Everybody (*in chorus*). You like that, eh? No, thank you! None of those things for me! The Lord deliver us!

Diego. But, my dear friends, after we have witnessed the farce of our own absurd changes of opinion, we have before us the tragedy of a bewildered spirit, gone astray and unable to find its way again. And it's not only Delia Morello! Wait, Francesco, you'll see! Soon you'll have them both on your hands! Both her and the other fellow!

Francesco. The other fellow? What other fellow? Michele Rocca?

Diego. Yes, Michele Rocca, himself!

First Friend. He came in last evening from Naples.

Second Friend. Ah, I have it! That was what I was trying to tell you fellows some time ago. I learned that he was looking for Palegari . . . to slap his face!

Prestino. Yes, but we knew all that! (*To Francesco.*) I told you so, didn't I?

Francesco (*to Diego*). But why should he come here to see me just now?

Diego. Because he insists on fighting a duel with Doro Palegari before you do! But now it would seem that he ought to have the duel with you!

Francesco. What do you mean . . . with me?

The Others (*all together*). Why with Franecsco? Why with Savio?

Diego. With you, of course! You have changed your mind, haven't you, honestly, sincerely? And thereby you assume responsibility for everything said by Palegari against him . . . at the Avanzi's the other night! What could be clearer? You have inverted your respective positions! It is obvious then! Rocca ought to make his fight with you!

Francesco. Not so fast, not so fast! What in the deuce are you talking about?

Diego. Excuse me . . . you are fighting this duel with Doro simply because he insulted you, are you not? Well, why did Doro insult you?

Francesco (*in some irritation*). Why, of course, of course . . . because I . . .

Diego (*speaking up quickly and carrying on the thought*). . . . because you, *loyally, sincerely* . . .

The Two Friends (*without letting him finish*). Yes, yes, he's right! Diego is right!

Diego. So the rôles have been inverted! You are left to defend Delia Morello, putting all the blame on Michele Rocca!

Prestino (*shocked*). Oh, let's quit joking!

Diego. Joking? (*To Francesco.*) Oh, if you ask me . . . you can boast this time of being right!

Francesco. So you want me to have a duel with Michele Rocca, too?

Diego. Ah, I couldn't say that! A duel with a man

in his frame of mind would be a very serious matter! The poor fellow is desperate!

The First Friend. I should say so! With Salvi's corpse lying between him and the girl he was going to marry.

Second Friend. The marriage broken off! . . .

Diego. And Delia Morello making a fool of him!

Francesco (*with a rising irritation*). What do you mean . . . a fool of him? You are saying she made a fool of him, now!

Diego. That she did use him for her own purposes, no one can deny!

Francesco. Treacherously, therefore, as I claimed at first!

Diego (*trying to stop him with a reproof*). Ah-ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah! There you go! Listen! The annoyance you now feel for having gotten into this mess ought not make you change your mind for still a third time!

Francesco. Not at all! Not at all! Excuse me . . . you said yourself that she went and confessed to Doro Palegari that I was right in accusing her of treachery!

Diego. You see? You see?

Francesco. But what do I see, damn it all? If I discover that she is now accusing herself and saying that I was right, why—of course—I change my mind and go back to my first position! (*Turning to the others.*) Don't you think I have a right to, you people?

Diego (*vehemently*). But I tell you that she used him treacherously . . . yes . . . if you insist on that word . . . but only in order to free Georgio Salvi from the danger he was running in marrying her! Understand? You have absolutely no right to claim that that was treachery toward Salvi. On the contrary, I am ready to defend her myself, even if she herself be her own accuser . . . I'll defend her even against herself. . . .

Francesco (*giving ground with some irritation*). . . . In view of the reasons . . . yes . . . of the reasons advanced by Doro Palegari . . .

Diego. . . . on account of which you . . .

Francesco. . . . yes, . . . changed my mind . . . changed my mind . . . exactly. . . . But the fact remains that as regards Rocca she was really treacherous all the time.

Diego. Treacherous? She was just a woman! Why not stop at that? He approached her with the idea of having his fun with her, giving her that impression also, so that she in her turn made a fool of him. That really is what's the matter with Michele Rocca! He is stung in his pride as a man and as a male! He is not yet ready to admit that he was just a helpless, stupid thing in the hands of a woman, a doll which Delia Morello tossed aside and broke to pieces after amusing herself in making it open and close its arms in prayer—just by pressing the spring of passion which that doll had in its insides somewhere! Huh! The doll has been picked up again and set in place, the wax nose of its wax face broken, the wax fingers on its wax hands gone—cracks in its wax head and in its wax body, and the spring—the spring of passion that it had in its gizzard—has broken through the cloth covering and is sticking out! But yet . . . no . . . the doll will not have it that way! The doll keeps crying at the top of its voice that it's not true; that that woman didn't make it say its prayers; that that woman did not use it as a plaything, breaking it to pieces when the game was done! No . . . no . . . it cries! Well, I ask you, did you ever see a more absurd spectacle than that?

Prestino (*losing control of himself and almost shaking his fist in Diego's face*). Why are you trying to make us laugh at such a serious matter, you clown?

Diego (*looking at Prestino in amazement, as the others do also*). I?

Prestino. You! Yes, you! Ever since you've been in here, you've been playing the clown, trying to make a fool of him, of me, of us, of everybody!

Diego. But also of myself, don't you think?

Prestino. Keep your compliments for yourself! It's easy to laugh the way you do, making us all out so many cocks on a weather vane which turns this way or that, according as the wind blows! I'm tired of this nonsense! How shall I describe it? When you talk that way you seem to put poison in my soul!

Diego. Not at all, my dear boy! I laugh because I have reasoned my heart dry!

Prestino. You said as much yourself . . . there is nothing in your heart! It is empty, cold, dead . . . that is why you laugh!

Diego. That is why you *think* I laugh!

Prestino. I think so because it's so! Even if it were true that people are as you say we are, I should think you would feel more like pitying us than laughing at us.

Diego (*offended in his turn, advancing toward Prestino aggressively, placing his two hands on the latter's two shoulders, and bringing his face up close, looking the man fixedly in the eye*). Pity? Yes . . . if you let yourself be examined this way . . .

Prestino (*puzzled*). What way?

Diego. This way . . . in the eye . . . just like this! No . . . look at me! This way . . . naked as you are . . . with all the filth and muck and smallness there is in you! In you as in me . . . in me as in you—all the fears—all the self-reproaches—all the hesitations and contradictions! Shake yourself free from the manikin you create out of a false interpretation of what you do and what you feel, and you'll at once see that the manikin you make yourself is nothing at all like what you really are or what you can really be!

Nothing at all like what is in you without your knowing that it is there—a terrible avenger if you resist it; though it at once becomes charitable toward all your shortcomings if you just give in and do not try to justify and delude yourself! Oh, I know . . . to cast aside that manikin, that fiction, seems in a certain way to be a denial of one's self, something unworthy of a man; and it will always be that way so long as we believe that humanness consists in what we call conscience, in that courage, if you wish, which we have shown on one single occasion rather than in the cowardice which on many occasions has counselled prudence. You have agreed to act as Savio's second in this stupid duel of Palegari's. (*Talking to Savio.*) And you thought that Palegari kept calling you a clown yesterday? Huh! He was calling himself a clown, and you didn't understand! He was calling names at that manikin which he could not see in himself, but which he could see in you because you showed it to him as in a mirror! I laugh . . . yes . . . I laugh in my own way, and my ridicule falls upon myself sooner than on anyone else! (*A pause. They all fall silent, each absorbed in his own thoughts. The following lines will be pronounced at intervals between pauses, as though each were talking to himself.*)

Francesco. Of course, I have no real animosity against Doro Palegari. He kept leading me on from one thing to another. (*A pause.*)

Prestino (*after some seconds*). So many times we have to pretend we are sure; and if such pretense only hurts us the more deeply, we are not more worthy of blame, but more worthy of pity.

First Friend (*after another pause, as though he were reading Francesco Savio's thoughts*). Who knows? It must be splendid out in the country today!

Francesco (*answering quickly and without surprise, as*

though to justify himself). Why I had actually bought some playthings to carry out to my sister's little girl.

Second Friend. A cute little tot she was that time I saw her.

Francesco. Oh, a dear little thing! Prettiest child I ever set my eyes on! So wise, as she looks up at you out of her big eyes! An angel! A cherub!

Diego (*to Francesco*). Listen! If I were you, Francesco . . . (*The butler appears in the doorway to the right.*)

Butler. May I interrupt, sir?

Francesco. What is it, Giovanni?

Butler. A message for you, sir.

Francesco (*approaching the butler and listening to what he has to say. Then with evident annoyance*). Now? How can I? Impossible! (*He turns and stands looking at his friends, hesitant, in great perplexity.*)

Diego (*understanding*). She is here?

Prestino. You cannot receive her! You must not!

First Friend. Of course not! You cannot while this point of honor is still pending!

Diego. Not at all! She has nothing to do with that!

Prestino. What do you mean? Why, she is the cause of the whole trouble? However, I won't argue the point. I am your second in this affair and I say no! I say you mustn't let her come in!

Second Friend. But you can't send a lady away like that, without even finding out what she's come for!

Diego. I really have no right to say anything.

First Friend (*to Francesco*). You might find out what she wants!

Second Friend. Yes, and if perchance . . .

Francesco. . . . she tries to put in a word about the duel . . .

Prestino. . . . end the interview at once! On that basis I consent!

Francesco. Very well! Very well! I'll tell her to go on about her business! That's what I'll do! Just leave it to me! (*Francesco withdraws, followed by the butler.*)

Diego. My only suggestion would be that he should advise her to . . . (*At this moment the veranda curtain is torn furiously aside and Michele Rocca breaks in from the garden in the throes of a dangerous excitement which he has difficulty in restraining. He is a person about thirty years old—black hair, dark complexion, traces of bitterness, of remorse, of passion, in the lines of his face. His whole expression, the nervous movements of his body, the twitching of his features, show that he is ready to go to any extreme.*

Rocca. If I may! (*Then surprised at seeing so many people he had not expected to find.*) Is this the place? I have come to the right house?

Prestino (*voicing his own amazement and that of the others*). Who are you?

Rocca. Michele Rocca.

Diego. Ah, so here he is!

Rocca (*to Diego*). You are Signor Francesco Savio?

Diego. No, I am not. Savio is in the other room. (*He points to the door on the Right.*)

Prestino. But if I may ask . . . how did you get in here in this way?

Rocca. I was shown to this entrance.

Diego. The porter thought he was one of Savio's friends!

Rocca. Am I mistaken? Did not a lady enter this house a few seconds before me?

Prestino. You mean that you were following her?

Rocca. Yes, I was following her. I knew that she was to come here.

Diego. So did I . . . and I knew that you would come here too.

Rocca. The most outrageous things are being said about me all over town! I know that Signor Savio, without ever having met me, has come to my defense. Now, he must not listen to that woman! He must not . . . without first hearing from me exactly how matters stand!

Prestino. But it's too late now, my dear sir!

Rocca. Too late? What do you mean?

Prestino. I said it was too late! Arbitration is now out of the question!

First Friend. A challenge has been made and accepted!

Second Friend. And the conditions signed!

Diego. And they both have changed their minds!

Prestino (*angrily to Diego*). You will be so good as to refrain from any further interference! To put it plainly, please mind your own damn business!

First Friend. Why do you keep trying to mix things up?

Diego. I'm not mixing anything up. I'm making it clearer! This gentleman came here under the impression that Savio has been defending him. I am simply pointing out that Savio has changed his mind, and is defending him no longer!

Rocca. Ah, I see! So now *he* is blaming me, too!

Diego. He is not the only one, notice!

Rocca. You too, for instance?

Diego. Yes, yes! I—and everybody else here, as you may see!

Rocca. I can well believe it! So far, you've been talking only with her!

Diego. No! No! Not at all! None of us has seen her nor has Savio, until just now! He has this minute stepped into the other room to find out what she wants!

Rocca. Why do you blame me then? And why does

Savio? At first he took my side! If he has changed his mind, why is he having his duel with Signor Palegari?

Diego. My dear sir, in your case—as I understand very well—in your case, madness assumes its most spectacular forms; but believe me, as I was saying just now, all of us are crazy in one way or another! This duel, as you must know, is being fought precisely because both the litigants have changed their minds!

First Friend (*along with the others, in some heat*). Don't listen to this fellow! He is quite mistaken!

Second Friend. They're going on with the duel because, after the trouble night before last, Palegari got angry . . .

First Friend (*raising his voice*) . . . and called Signor Savio a clown!

Prestino (*raising his voice still higher*). Signor Savio took offense at the insult and issued a challenge . . .

Diego (*rasing his voice till it overrides the others*) . . . though by that time they were both in perfect agreement!

Rocca (*vehemently*). In agreement in condemning me without having heard my case? I should like to know—how is this worthless woman able to get everybody on her side like that?

Diego. Everybody except herself . . . except herself!

Rocca. Except herself?

Diego. Not quite that! Don't imagine that she is on one side or on the other! She doesn't know exactly where she stands! Examine your own state of mind, a little more carefully, Signor Rocca, and you will see that even you are not quite sure where you stand!

Rocca. I'm glad you enjoy your own jokes! However, will you kindly announce me, one of you gentlemen? Say that Signor Michele Rocca would like to be received by Signor Francesco Savio.

Prestino. But what do you want to see him about? I repeat, it's too late!

Rocca. What do you know about it? If he's against me now, all the better!

Prestino. But he's in the other room there with the lady!

Rocca. Better still! I followed her to this house on purpose! Perhaps it is just as well for her that I am meeting her with other people, in the presence, in fact, of a stranger whom chance has seen fit to involve in our troubles. So then, I have made up my mind—for anything! I was blind . . . blind . . . but now the simple fact that I find myself here unexpectedly with all you gentlemen . . . the simple fact that I must speak . . . answer your questions . . . well . . . I feel as though . . . I could—all of a sudden—breathe more easily . . . as though the atmosphere had been cleared! I had been keeping to myself for days and days! You gentlemen can't understand the agony I have been through! I tried to save the man whose sister I was to marry, a man I had come to love as my own brother . . .!

Prestino. You tried to save him? That's a good one!

First Friend. By running off with the girl he was in love with!

Second Friend. The night before he was to marry her!

Rocca. No! No! Listen . . . listen, please! Not at all! I wasn't trying to steal his girl . . . and you say he was going to marry her! It wasn't much of a job to save him! It was sufficient to demonstrate to him, to make him see beyond any question of doubt that the woman he was going to marry because he wanted her could be his—as she could be anybody's—without any question of marriage!

Prestino. Anyhow, you spent the night with her . . .!

Rocca. But on a bet . . . on a bet!

First Friend. On what bet?

Second Friend. Bet with whom?

Rocca. Let me finish! Let me finish! A bet with him! You see, it was by arrangement with his sister and his mother! He had introduced her to the family, doing violence thereby to all his feelings of propriety; and I, by an arrangement I made with his sister and his mother, followed the two of them to Naples with the excuse of helping them get settled in their new house! He was to marry the girl a few months later. However, there was a quarrel . . . one of those quarrels that often arise between people about to get married. She lost her temper and left him for some days! (*He covers his eyes with a hand as though to hide a vision that tempts and horrifies at the same time.*) Oh, she went away . . . and I can see her . . . I can see her! . . . (*He lowers his hand, his face showing greater and greater emotion.*) For I was present at the quarrel! . . . (*Mastering his feelings.*) I seized that occasion as a favorable opportunity for demonstrating to Giorgio the absurdity of what he was about to do. It's incredible, isn't it? Incredible! And yet those women are often that way, it seems! Do you know, she never gave him the slightest concession?

First Friend (*intent, as all the others are, on the narrative*). Of course!

Rocca. Not only that. At Capri there, she had shown herself disdainful and contemptuous toward all the men, keeping to herself . . . proud and reserved! "Well, I'll bet you," said he to me, "I'll bet you!" And he challenged me to do what I bet him that I could do, promising that if I won the bet, he'd break with the girl and have nothing more to do with her! Well, instead, he shot himself!

First Friend. But I don't understand! You lent yourself to such a scheme!

Rocca. It was a bet! To save him!

Second Friend. But the treachery of it all!

Rocca. Yes, horrible . . . horrible!

Second Friend. But his treachery toward you, I mean!

Rocca. Yes, he did not play fair with me!

Second Friend. He shot himself!

Prestino. It's incredible . . . incredible!

Rocca. . . . that I lent myself to such a thing? . . .

Prestino. . . . No, that he allowed you to strike such a bargain with him!

Rocca. But don't you see? He did it on purpose! Because he had noticed . . . noticed right away, you understand . . . that she had tried—from the very moment when she saw me with his sister—she had tried spitefully, with the most evil intent, to attract me . . . attract me to herself, wheedling me with all her artfulness! Why, it was Giorgio himself who called my attention to it! So it was easy, you understand—it was easy to make the proposal I made at that moment, saying to him: "Why, you know she would give herself even to me!"

Prestino. And in that case . . . well, I give up. He dared you—but he was really daring himself!

Rocca. But he ought to have told me! He ought to have shouted it into my ears if necessary! He should have made me understand that he was lost, poisoned forever! That it was useless for me to try to cure him of a venom from that viper's fangs which had sunk so deep into his soul!

Diego. Viper? Viper? No, excuse me! I would hardly say viper!

Rocca. Viper! Viper! Viper!

Diego. I wonder . . . I wonder! A bit too ingenuous it seems to me, a bit too ingenuous, for a viper. If there was so much poison in her fangs, why should she have bitten you so soon, so immediately, I might even say?

Prestino. But she may have been bent on ruining Giorgio Salvi, breaking his heart, encompassing his death!

Rocca. She may.

Diego. And how is that possible? She had succeeded in forcing him to marry her, hadn't she? Why spoil everything before getting what she wanted?

Rocca. But she never suspected. . .

Diego. Why do you call her a viper then? A viper is always deliberate. A snake such as you say she is would have bitten afterwards, but not before! If now she did bite nevertheless, it means either that she is not so bad as you say she is, or else that she was not trying to harm Giorgio Salvi!

Rocca. So you think then . . .

Diego. It is you who make me think so, understand! You are trying to tell me that she is a treacherous woman. I am keeping to what you say yourself . . . and the case for perfidy doesn't hang together! You say she was trying to trick him into marrying her, but then just before the wedding she gives herself to you!

Rocca (*jumping to his feet*). Gives herself to me? Who ever said she gave herself to me? I had nothing to do with the woman . . . nothing at all! And you imagine I ever could have thought of such a thing?

Diego (*in astonishment, like the rest*). Ah, really?

The Others. What! Is it possible?

Rocca. You see, all I wanted was proof . . . proof that she . . . something in short to convince *him!* (*At this moment the door on the right opens and Francesco Savio appears in great excitement and commotion. He has been in the other room with Delia Morello. Fulfilling her promise to prevent the duel between him and Doro Palegari, she has used all her arts upon him, intoxicating him with herself. He at once assails Michele Rocco vehemently.*)

Francesco. And what is this? What are you doing

here? What do you want in my house? What mess are you trying to stir up here?

Rocca. I came to tell you . . .

Francesco. There is nothing you need to tell me!

Rocca. You are mistaken! I have something to say, and not only to you!

Francesco. I should advise you not to be quite so positive in your threats!

Rocca. I am making no threats. I was anxious to talk with you.

Francesco. You have been following a lady to my house!

Rocca. Ah, I have just been explaining to your friends here . . .

Francesco. What do I care about your explanations to my friends? You have been following a woman who was coming to see me! Do you deny it?

Rocca. Yes, because if you intend to fight a duel with Signor Palegari . . .

Francesco. What duel? Nonsense! I am not going to fight a duel with anybody!

Prestino (*in amazement*). What is that you say? No duel?

Francesco. I am calling it off!

First Friend, Diego, Second Friend (*speaking at once*). Are you crazy? Do you mean it? That's ridiculous!

Rocca (*also speaking at the same time, but in a louder voice, with a guffaw*). Of course you're calling it off! It's *her* work!

Francesco (*about to attack him physically*). Shut your mouth or I . . .

Prestino (*running in front of him and holding him back*). No! First you must answer me! You're calling this duel with Palegari off?

Francesco. Yes, I am calling it off! It's all nonsense, and I have no right to add to a woman's despair.

Prestino. But it will be worse, if you don't fight! The conditions of the duel have been drawn up and the papers signed!

Francesco. But it's sheer nonsense to have a duel with Palegari now! It's ridiculous!

Prestino. Why so ridiculous?

Francesco. Ridiculous! It's ridiculous because we are in entire agreement . . . Oh, you understand, Prestina, when you have a chance to figure in some affair like this, you are ready for a week's holiday!

Prestino. But Palegari insulted you, and you challenged him!

Francesco. But nonsense, nonsense, just as Doro said, nonsense! I am calling it off!

Prestino. This is incredible . . . incredible!

Rocca. He promised her he wouldn't fight with her champion?

Francesco. Yes, why shouldn't I, since I have you here?

Rocca. I see! That is why you promised not to?

Francesco. No, since you are here insulting me in my own house! What do you want of that lady, anyhow?

Prestino. You can't do that!

Francesco. He's been following her around for a day or more!

Prestino. But you can't fight with *him* now!

Francesco. No one can say I am challenging a less dangerous opponent!

Prestino. Not at all! Not at all! That won't make any difference! Because if I should go now and offer to fight Palegari in your place . . .

First Friend (*almost shouting at Francesco*). You will be disqualified!

Rocca. But I can ignore the disqualification!

First Friend. No, because we would prevent you!

Prestino (*to Francesco*). And you won't find a soul to act as your second! However, you have all day to think it over. I can't stay here any longer, so I'm going away!

Diego. He'll think it over, all right!

Prestino (*to the two friends*). This is no place for us! Let's be going! (*The three of them withdraw by way of the garden, Rear.*)

Diego (*walking out on the veranda after them and calling*). Not too fast, gentlemen, not too fast! (*Then turning to Francesco.*) And you had better watch your step!

Francesco. You go to the devil! (*Again assailing Rocca.*) And you!—you will find the door this way! Please make use of it! I am at your service when, where, and as, you wish! (*At this point Delia Morello appears at the doorway to the Right. The moment she sees Michele Rocca, so changed from what he had been, another person in fact, she suddenly finds the mask lifted from her eyes—the mask, the fiction, which both she and he have hitherto been using to defend themselves against the secret passion by which from the very beginning they have been madly attracted toward one another, a passion which they have been translating before their own minds into terms of pity and interest for Giorgio Salvi, each pretending to be trying to save him from one or the other. With this fiction gone, destroyed by the sudden shock they feel at being brought thus face to face, they stand looking at each other, pale and trembling.*)

Rocca (*with a sob*). Delia! Delia! (*He advances to embrace her.*)

Delia (*sinking into his arms and accepting his kiss*). No! No! My poor boy! My poor boy! (*To the horror and disgust of Francesco and Diego, they embrace frantically.*)

Rocca. Delia! My Delia!

Diego. That is the way they hate each other! Ah, how they hate each other! You see? You see?

Francesco. But it's absurd! It's monstrous! With the corpse of a man between them!

Rocca (*gathering Delia into his arms, like an animal turning ravenously upon its prey*). Monstrous? Yes! But she must belong to me! She must suffer with me . . . with me!

Delia (*suddenly horrified, and tearing herself loose ferociously*). No! No! Go away! Go away! Don't touch me!

Rocca (*struggling to hold her*). No! No! Mine! Mine! Here, with me, in my despair! Here!

Delia (*still struggling*). Let me go, I tell you! Let me go! Murderer!

Francesco. Yes! Let her go! I say let her go!

Rocca. You keep your distance!

Delia (*freeing herself at last*). Let me go! (*Francesco and Diego restrain Rocca from throwing himself upon her.*) I am not afraid of you! No! No! No harm can come to me from you! Not even if you kill me!

Rocca (*speaking at the same time, struggling with the two men and shouting*). Delia! Delia! You must belong to me! You are mine! You must belong to me! I cannot live without you!

Delia. I am free! I am free! I feel nothing, nothing whatever! It was an illusion! I thought it was compassion . . . fear . . . but no, it was nothing . . . nothing!

Rocca (*still struggling*). Let me alone! Let me alone!

Francesco and Diego (*talking together*). You are two wild beasts! Monstrous! Two monsters!

Delia. Let him go! I am not afraid of him! I let

him kiss me! But it was coldly, without passion! It was not fear! It was not pity!

Rocca. Yes, you wretch! I know! I know your kisses are worthless, but I want you! I am going to have you!

Delia. Any harm you might do me, even if you killed me, would not be so bad as that! Another crime! Poison! Death itself! I want to remain as I am! I want to suffer as I am!

Rocca (*still struggling to free himself from the two men*). Her love is worth nothing, but all that I have suffered on her account gives it value to me! It is not love I feel for you! It's hatred! It's hatred!

Delia. Hatred! Yes, it's hatred with me, too! Hatred!

Rocca. The very blood that has been shed on her account! (*With a sudden burst of violence he succeeds in freeing his arms.*) Have pity on me . . . pity on me! (*He pursues her about the room.*)

Delia (*trying to keep away*). No! No! Don't you touch me! It will be the worse for you!

Diego and Francesco (*getting hold of him again*). But keep away, won't you? You must answer for this with me!

Delia. It will be the worse for him if he tries to arouse my pity either for myself or for him! I have none! But if you have any regard for him, send him away from here! Send him away!

Rocca. How can I go away? You know that my life was drowned forever in Giorgio's blood!

Delia. The brother of the girl you were to marry! And you did not try to save him from dishonor!

Rocca. You lie! That is not true! You know that we have both been lying!

Delia. Yes, we have both been lying! Two falsehoods!

Rocca. You have wanted me as I have wanted you, from the moment when we first saw each other!

Delia. Yes! Yes! But it was to punish you!

Rocca. Yes, so with me! It was to punish you! But your life, too, has been drowned, drowned forever in Giorgio's blood!

Delia. Yes, you are right! You are right! (*She runs to him and throws herself into his arms, pushing aside the two men who are restraining him.*) Yes, it is true! It is true!

Rocca (*embracing her again desperately*). So we must both drown in that blood, but drown together . . . this way . . . in each other's arms . . . not I alone . . . not you alone . . . but both together! This way! This way!

Diego. If they don't change their minds!

Rocca. (*Carrying Delia in his arms toward the door into the garden, leaving the two men standing there in utter astonishment and stupefaction.*) Yes . . . with me . . . with me! Come! Come! With me . . . away, with me . . . away, with me!

Francesco. Two lunatics!

Diego. And you? And I?

SECOND CHORAL INTERLUDE

Again the curtain rises as soon as possible after it has fallen on the second act; and again the theatre lobby appears with the entrances leading to the hall of the theatre. But this time no one comes out for some moments. The Ticket Taker, one or two Ushers, Maids from the woman's room are standing about in some apprehension; because, along toward the end of the second act, they have seen the Moreno woman, despite the interference of her three male frinds, run through the corridor toward the stage entrance. Now the sound of shouting, clapping, hissing, comes out from the theatre, growing louder and louder all the time, either be-

cause the actors have not yet appeared before the curtain to make their bows to the audience or because something strange and unusual is going on inside.

One of the Ticket Takers. What the devil is the matter in there?

Another Ticket Taker. Isn't it Pirandello tonight? What else can you expect?

An Usher. No, the audience is applauding, but the actors refuse to come out.

A Maid. But there's shouting and screaming on the stage, don't you hear?

Another Usher. And the house is in an uproar!

Second Maid. Has that woman anything to do with it?

Ticket Taker. I imagine she has. The men with her were having a devil of a time keeping her quiet!

First Maid. She got in behind the scenes!

First Ticket Taker. She was trying to get in at the end of the first act!

Another Maid. But hell is let loose in there! Don't you hear? (*Two or three of the doors into the theatre are thrown open and some spectators dash out into the lobby, the uproar in the auditorium becoming louder for the moment.*)

The Spectators. But she got in there on the stage! What's the matter? Are they fighting? (*Shouting. Screaming.*) And the actors are not answering their curtain call! (*More spectators appear, coming through the doors into the lobby and looking toward the stage entrance to the Right. They are followed by a great number of spectators who come on through the Left. They are all shouting*:) What's the matter? What's going on? What's the trouble?

Confused Voices. There's a fight on behind the scenes! There . . . do you hear? On the stage! Why? Why? Who knows?

Gangway, please! What's happened? What's going on? Trouble tonight, all right! Let me get by! Is the play over? Isn't there a third act? There must be a third act! Make way there, please! Yes, at four o'clock sharp, so long! . . . Don't forget! But did you hear that? They're fighting! I am going in there myself! Do you hear that? It's scandalous! They've no right to! What's it all about? Why it seems that . . . God only knows! What the deuce! Why . . . why . . . there . . . there! The door is opening!

(*The stage entrance is thrown open, and for the moment the uproar on the stage—shrieks from the actresses, oaths from actors and from the stage manager, the voices of the Moreno woman and her three friends—become louder. These noises will be drowned eventually by the confusion among the spectators crowding around the stage entrance, varied by the angry protests of a few people, some of whom are trying to get to the stage and others are trying to get away and out of the theatre.*)

Voices From the Stage (*actors speaking*). Get out of here! Get out of there! Back where you belong! Get that woman away! Have her arrested! She'll pay me for that! Back where you belong! Get out of here!

Voice of the Moreno Woman. It's a disgrace! It's a crime! I won't! I won't!

Voice of the Stage Manager. You just be moving along!

Voice of the Moreno Woman. You're insulting me publicly!

Voice of One of Her Friends. Remember she's a woman!

Voice of Another of Her Friends. Don't you dare strike a woman!

Voice of One of the Actors. Woman? Nonsense! She's making all the trouble! Get her out of here! Get her out of here!

Voices of Some Actresses. What a cat! For shame! For shame!

Voices of Some Actors. Lucky for her she's a woman! She deserves every bit of it! Get her out of here!

Stage Manager. Clear that doorway, there! Clear that doorway!

Voices From the Crowd of Spectators (*all talking at once, with occasional hoots, jeers, and applause*). Signora Moreno! The Moreno woman! Who is she! She slapped the leading lady's face! Who? Who slapped her? Signora Moreno! The Moreno woman! Who is she? The leading lady! No! No! It was the author's face she slapped? Pirandello? She slapped his face! Who? Who slapped his face? Signora Moreno! No! The leading lady! The author slapped her face? No! No! The other way about! The leading lady slapped the author's face! Not at all! Not at all! Signora Moreno assaulted the leading lady and pulled her hair!

Voices From the Stage. Enough of this! Out of here! Put her out! Put her out! Cowards! Wretches! Call the police! What a woman! Put her out! Put her out!

Voices From the Spectators. Go on with the play! Put them out! Less noise! Shut up! Signora Moreno! Put her out! The third act! We want the third act! Pirandello! Put him out! A speech! A speech from Pirandello! Put him out! A speech! He's to blame! Sh-sh-sh-sh! Make way there! The third act! Clear the way! Clear the way!

(*Some actors and actresses from the play on the stage, more especially those appearing in the third act, elbow their*

way through the crowd gathered before the stage entrance. With them appear the Stage Manager and the Treasurer of the theatre, the latter trying to persuade them to go on with the play. The lobby is thrown into the greatest agitation. At first the spectators are silent, eagerly listening to the dialogue of the stage people; though later on they will break occasionally into noisy comment of approval or disapproval.)

Treasurer of the Theatre. But for heaven's sake, use your brains. The crowd will want its money back! You want to stop the play?

Actors and Actresses (*talking all at the same time*). Not on your life! I am going home! We won't put up with this! We are all going home! This is too much! It's a disgrace! We refuse to put up with it! We are going to strike in protest!

Stage Manager. Protest? Who are you protesting against?

One of the Actresses. Against the author, and rightly so!

One of the Actors. And against the producer! Who ever thought of producing such a comedy as this!

Treasurer. But you can't protest this way! If you go away and don't finish the play, we are ruined! This is pure Bolshevism!

Voices From Among the Spectators. Fine! Fine! That's the way to talk! Not at all! The actors are right! They're right!

The Actors (*all speaking together*). Yes! Yes! We protest! We protest!

An Actor. You can't compel us to play a comedy with a key!

Voices From Some Ingenuous Spectators. A key? Where's the key? What's a comedy with a key?

Actors. We refuse! We refuse!

Voices of Other Spectators. Of course! Everybody knows it! It's disgraceful! It's scandalous! You can't help seeing! The Moreno case! She's here! In the theatre! She got in behind the scenes! She slapped the leading lady's face!

Voices of Spectators and Friends of Pirandello (*all talking together and in great confusion*). But nobody noticed! It's a good play! We want the third act! Give us our money back! We bought our tickets! The third act! The third act!

One of the Actors. But we refuse to have our faces slapped!

An Actor. Let's all go home! I, for my part, am going home!

An Actress. The leading lady has already gone home!

Voices of Spectators. Gone home? How did she go out? Through the stage entrance! Why?

Actress. Because a woman came in on the stage and slapped her face!

Voices of Spectators in Argument. Slapped her face? Yes! Yes! Signora Moreno! And she was right! Who was right? The Moreno woman? Why did she slap her face? The leading lady!

One of the Actors. Because she saw an allusion to herself in the play!

Another Actor. And she thought we had conspired with the author to make fun of her?

First Actress. We refuse to be treated that way!

Baron Nuti (*accompanied by two friends as in the first interlude, more than ever excited and confused, pushes his way forward*). It's true! It's unheard of! It's a disgrace! You're right in stopping the show!

One of His Friends. Hush! Don't make matters worse! Let's go home!

Baron Nuti. It's a disgrace, ladies and gentlemen! Two people pilloried in public! The private affairs of two people exposed to public ridicule!

Treasurer (*in despair*). The play seems to have moved from the stage to the lobby!

Voices of Spectators Hostile To the Author. He's right! He's right! It's a disgrace! They ought to put a stop to it! They're right! They're right!

Voices of Spectators Favorable To Pirandello. Not at all! Not at all! It was a good show! The third act! Where is the third act. Give us the third act! Disgrace? Nonsense! It could be anybody! Where's the slander?

Treasurer (*to the actors*). Shall we go on with the show or shall we not?

Baron Nuti (*seizing one of the spectators by the front of his coat and addressing him so violently that everyone falls silent at the spectacle of his fury*). You say it's all right? You approve? They have a right to take me and expose me there on the stage in public? Show me off, and all my sorrows, in the presence of a crowd? Make me say things that I never thought of saying and do things that I never thought of doing? (*In the silence that greets Baron Nuti's harangue, the Stage Manager will appear from the stage entrance, walking a few steps ahead of the Moreno woman who, weeping, disheveled, half fainting, is being rather dragged than led out of the theatre by her three male companions. The exchange of sentences between the Stage Manager and Signora Moreno will fall upon the silence as a reply to Baron Nuti's words. Everyone meantime will turn toward the stage entrance, making way for Signora Moreno and her companions. Nuti will release his grasp on the*

spectator he has been assailing, and turns to ask:) What's the matter?

Stage Manager. But you know very well that neither the author nor the leading lady have ever met you! They don't know you at all!

Signora Moreno. She mimicked my voice! She used my manner—all my gestures! She was imitating me! I recognized myself!

Stage Manager. But why should you believe it was you?

Signora Moreno. No! No! That isn't so! It was so terrible to see myself there on the stage acting that way! The idea! Why! I . . . I . . . kissing that man! (*She suddenly becomes aware of Baron Nuti's presence and utters a shriek, covering her face with her hands.*) Oh! Oh! There he is! There he is! There!

Baron Nuti. Amelia! Amelia!

(*General commotion among the spectators, who can scarcely believe their eyes, as they see the very characters and the very scene they have witnessed at the end of the second act, present now before them. Their astonishment should be manifested, however, only by facial expression, by brief comments delivered in low tones, and a few hushed exclamations.*)

Voices of Spectators. Oh! Look! Look! There they are! Oh! In real life! Both of them! The same scene over again! Look! Look!

Signora Moreno (*desperately, to the three men with her*). Take him away! Take him away!

Her Companions. Yes! Let's go away! Let's go away!

Baron Nuti (*dashing upon her*). No! No! You must come with me! You must come with me!

Signora Moreno (*tearing herself from his grasp*). No!

Let me alone! Let me alone! Don't touch me! Murderer! Murderer!

Baron Nuti. You heard that on the stage!

Signora Moreno. Let me alone! I am not afraid of you!

Baron Nuti. But it was true! It's our punishment! It's our punishment! And we must suffer it together! Your place is with me! Come! Come!

Signora Moreno. Let me alone, I say! I hate you! I hate you!

Baron Nuti. We are drowning . . . drowning in his blood! It was true! Come with me! Come! (*He drags her off to the Left.*)

(*Most of the spectators follow with noisy comments and exclamations.*)

Spectators. Oh! Really! It can't be! Incredible! How horrible! There they are! Look! Delia Morello and Michele Rocca! (*Other spectators continue standing in the lobby, but looking after them and making more or less the same remarks.*)

A Spectator (*who has not grasped the situation*). And they complain because the same thing was done on the stage!

Stage Manager. Yes, and the leading lady had the courage to come and slap my face . . . there, on the stage!

Many Voices. Incredible! Incredible! Absurd!

A Spectator Who Understands. But no! It's all natural enough! They rebelled because they saw themselves there, as in a mirror, forced into a situation that has the eternity of art!

Stage Manager. They did it over again to the very gesture!

A Spectator Who Understands. And that's natural, too! They have done, here before our eyes and quite in-

vountarily, something that the author had foreseen! (*Some of the spectators approve. Others laugh.*)

Treasurer of the Theatre To the Stage Manager. But I should like to know whether you intend holding a debate right here?

Stage Manager. You want to close the theatre? What have I got to do with that? Tell them to get out!

Treasurer. Well, I can't have the third act! The actors have gone home!

Stage Manager. Post a placard calling the show off!

Treasurer. But some of the audience are still in their seats!

Stage Manager. Very well! I'll make the announcement from behind the footlights!

Treasurer. Yes, that's the way out of it! Go and do that!

(*The stage manager starts for the stage entrance, while the treasurer begins shooing people out of the lobby.*) We are closing up, gentlemen! We are closing up! If you please, gentlemen, the play is over for tonight! The play is over for tonight!

(*The curtain falls, but immediately the stage manager will make his way through the central opening of the curtain and come forward to the footlights.*)

Stage Manager. The management is grieved to announce that in view of unfortunate incidents which took place at the end of the second act, we shall be unable to continue the performance this evening.

THE PLEASURE OF HONESTY

(*Il piacere dell 'onestà*)

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

Angelo Baldovino
Agata Renni
La Signora Maddalena (her mother)
Marquis Fabio Colli
Maurizio Setti (his cousin)
A Clergyman (the rector of St. Martha's)
Marchetto Fongi (a broker)
Four Directors of the Board
A Maid
A Butler
A Nurse (silent)

A city of central Italy, in our own time

THE PLEASURE OF HONESTY

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

ACT I

ANGELO BALDOVINO *is a man of about forty; light hair, turning gray around his temples, and somewhat thin on the top of his head. A short, reddish beard. He is wearing a heavy brown suit, somewhat threadbare. His demeanor is earnest, grave, serious, though his eyes, keen and penetrating, give a touch of vivacity to his general bearing. He talks slowly and in a deep voice. One of his mannerisms is to play with a pair of glasses which he holds most of the time in his hand. He is neglectful of his appearance—his hair uncombed, his beard badly trimmed. He talks and smiles like a person who has had a tragedy in his life. Hidden deep in his being are many bitter and insurgent memories, from which he has derived a curious philosophy—a mixture at once of irony and indulgent tolerance. This applies especially to the first act, and to a part of the third. In the second, however, his exteriors, at least, seem transformed. He is better dressed, and more careful of his appearance; his hair and beard are well kept. He is more at his ease, but still maintains a certain dignified reserve. Now he is quite obviously the gentleman of breeding. He has corrected his habit of playing with his glasses.*

AGATA RENNI, *twenty-seven; her pride is put on to cover the crushing sense of her shame, just as her hardness is a compensation for the passionate expensiveness native to her. Desperate and rebellious in the first act, she is later on more*

easily mistress of herself, and goes out, her head high and erect, to meet whatever the future has in store for her.

Signora Maddalena, *fifty-two, well dressed, still beautiful, but resigned to her age, utterly devoted to her daughter, and seeing everything through her daughter's eyes.*

Marquis Fabio Colli, *forty-three. Dressed in the height of fashion, perfect in his manners, genial, good-natured, kindly, but with an undercurrent of deep feeling; short, inclined to stoutness, but not to such an extent as to detract from his dignity and attractiveness as a nobleman and a gentleman of faultless training.*

Maurizio Setti, *thirty-eight, well dressed and offhand in his manners, quite at his ease in all circumstances, ready and brisk of speech—a man of the world; fond of the ladies.*

Marquetto Fongi; *fifty-two, an old fox, short of stature, suggesting shrewdness, rascality; a sharper. A keen mind, not without humor; and a manner and bearing not out of place in good company.*

A well-furnished parlor in the Renni mansion. General entrance in back, Centre. Door to Right. Windows to Left.

As the curtain rises, the stage is empty. After a time the door, Rear, opens. Enter the maid, *showing the way for* Maurizio Setti.

The Maid. This way, if you please. I will tell Signora Renni at once.

(*She goes out through the door, Right. Shortly, through the same door, enters Signora Maddalena, nervous, and in evident anxiety.*)

Maddalena. So glad you came, Setti! Well?

Maurizio. He's here. He came with me this morning.

Maddalena. And it's all right?

Maurizio. Quite.

Maddalena. He understands everything—clearly?

Maurizio. Everything—everything—don't worry.

Maddalena (*hesitating, fearful*). You are sure? He understands just how it is?

Maurizio. Why, I went over it all carefully with him, and I told him just how matters stand—the whole situation.

Maddalena (*nodding—bitterly*). Yes, I see. You told him everything.

Maurizio. Well, you understand, Signora—I had to.

Maddalena. Of course. But, still—

Maurizio. Don't worry. Things are different, you see—according to people, time, conditions . . .

Maddalena. Yes—exactly—just so.

Maurizio. Well—that's what I made him understand, you may be sure.

Maddalena. He knows the trouble we are in? He knows who my daughter is?

Maurizio. Of course he does—of course.

Maddalena. And he agreed—without any objections?

Maurizio. None whatever. Don't worry on that score.

Maddalena. Oh, my dear Maurizio, you keep telling me not to worry! How can I help it? What sort of a person is he? Tell me something about him, at least.

Maurizio. Oh—not bad looking. Can't say he is anything remarkable, as far as looks go. But he'll pass inspection. Carries himself rather well. Evidently a person of breeding. In fact, they tell me he has a title, though he has dropped it, it seems. A Baldovino, in short!

Maddalena. But you know what I mean—what kind of a man is he—inside?

Maurizio. A good sort—I am sure.

Maddalena. But can he—how shall I say?—can he carry it off with people—can he talk—you know what I mean—

Maurizio. Oh, he comes from Macerata, Signora, and in the country, you know, they use the language that—

Maddalena. But that's not what I am thinking of. You see—well—it all comes down to this, doesn't it—you understand . . . One word a little off color . . . without that certain . . . (*She stumbles, from one phrase to the next, as though she could hardly bring herself to saying exactly what she means.*) . . . without that certain . . . touch! . . . You know how hard it is to say it! (*She takes out a handkerchief, and begins to sob.*)

Maurizio. Everything is all right, Signora. Don't take it so hard.

Maddalena. You know, it would be the death of my poor little girl!

Maurizio. No—in that regard there is not the slightest ground for uneasiness, Signora. I give you my word for it. He is a gentleman. Good manners—a man who knows his place—correct; and, besides, a man of tact, I assure you. He gets a situation instantly. No, you can take my word for it. There is no reason to worry. . . .

Maddalena. Believe me, my dear Setti, you don't know how upset I am over it all! Why, I just can't get over it! The idea of suddenly finding yourself face to face with a situation like this! You know, I feel it as one of those misfortunes that somewhow throw your doors wide open, so that any outsider can come in and spy upon your most private affairs!

Maurizio. Oh, it's life, Signora!

Maddalena. And that poor girl! You don't know what a good girl she is! If you could only see her and hear her take on—it's terrible, Maurizio—it's terrible!—

Maurizio. I can well imagine! But, believe me, Signora, I interfered, myself, only because—

Maddalena (*interrupting him, clasping his hands in*

hers). Oh, I know—I know! And you see, I have no secrets with you. You are like one of the family—you are more like a brother to Fabio than a cousin.

Maurizio. By the way—is Fabio in the house?

Maddalena. Yes—in the other room. I don't know whether he can leave her yet. You see, we have to watch her. Do you know, when she heard you ring the bell, she made for a window!

Maurizio. Really? On my account?

Maddalena. Oh no—not on your account. But she knows the reason why you went to Macerata, and who it is you probably came back with!

Maurizio. But that—if you don't mind my saying so—well . . . it seems to me that. . . .

Maddalena. No! Don't think that! The poor girl is all worked up. She is really in a terrible state of mind.

Maurizio. I understand. But I thought everything was clear. I thought she had approved of the idea herself.

Maddalena. She did—and that is why now—

Maurizio (*in alarm*). She has changed her mind?

Maddalena. No. . . . How could she change her mind? . . . But you see, she must . . . after all . . . she is the one most concerned . . . she must *like* him.

Maurizio. Of course—and she will have to convince herself.

Maddalena. Oh, Setti! My poor girl will die of all this! She'll die!

Maurizio. Oh no—it's not so bad as that, Signora. Everything will turn out all right.

Maddalena. No — you don't know her — you don't know her. I'm afraid she will be doing something to spoil things before we can get started. Oh, I understand it is mostly my fault. But with Fabio, you see—well, I didn't think that he (*Maurizio makes a gesture of resignation.*)

. . . Oh, I know it can't be helped. I suppose we had all just better close our eyes and swallow the scandal.

Maurizio. But what scandal, Signora? We have already made arrangements—

Maddalena (*covering her face with her hands*). Oh, don't, please! This is almost worse than the thing itself. Believe me, Setti, it was weakness with me first, but now it is remorse—remorse!

Maurizio. I understand.

Maddalena. But you can't understand! You are a man—you are not even a father! You can't understand what a torment it is for a mother to see her daughter getting older and older, beginning to lose the bloom of her youth! Well, a woman hasn't the courage to watch her daughter with the strictness which prudence—I might even say—which virtue—commands. Virtue—ah, virtue—my dear Setti! . . . Imagine a mother who has in one way or another lived her life—who has loved! And there your daughter is, looking at you—begging you, almost, to have mercy on her! So you close your eyes—you pretend not to notice! And then, suddenly—you find that your silence, your toleration, has brought the responsibility on you! And then—what a fix! What a fix! . . . But, as I said, I thought that with Fabio. . . .

Maurizio. Oh, Fabio! Why, he is as much in love with her as she with him.

Maddalena. I know—I know—

Maurizio. And if he had been free—

Maddalena. I know—I know. He *is* mad about her! And, do you know, if he had not been really in love with her, I am sure that what has happened would not have happened.

Maurizio. Fabio is a good boy.

Maddalena. And so unhappy—tied to a wife like that!

You see, the very considerations that should have prevented a tragedy such as this have been the very ones to bring it on. For if Fabio were free, he would marry my daughter, wouldn't he? Tell me—in all conscience!

Maurizio. Oh, of course he would.

Maddalena. No—tell me what you really think, please!

Maurizio. Well, you can see yourself how deeply in love he is, and how he is suffering now.

Maddalena. Yes—he is, isn't he? And you don't know how much good it does me to hear you say so. It shows that at least someone understands!

Maurizio. Why, my dear Signora, how you hurt me! I have for you and for Signorina Agata the very greatest respect—the sincerest and most devoted affection.

Maddalena. Thank you, Setti—thank you!

Maurizio. I mean every word I say. Otherwise, you may rely upon it, I would have taken no interest in this affair at all.

Maddalena. Thank you, Setti. And understand: when a woman—a poor girl—has waited for years and years for someone to love her and be her husband, without ever finding such a man, and finally meets a person who would be deserving of all her love, knowing that he has been ill-treated, embittered, wronged, unjustly hurt by another woman . . . well—she is not likely to resist the impulse to show him that not all women are like the one he married—that there are a few who can requite love with love, and appreciate the good fortune which that other woman has tossed aside.

Maurizio. Yes. Fabio *didn't* get a square deal from his wife. You are right, Signora—he didn't deserve such treatment.

Maddalena. Of course, you say to yourself—"No, you mustn't—you mustn't!" The girl feels that way, and so does the man, if he is a decent fellow. And her mother sees

she mustn't, too! . . . Well, you put up with it for a time in silence—you listen to the voice of duty—you endure the torment—

Maurizio. But at last the time comes—

Maddalena. Yes—and it comes when you least expect it! It is a beautiful night in May-time. . . . You go to the window . . . starlight . . . the fragrance of the flowers outside . . . but in your heart a grip of anguish, a flood of desperate tenderness for your daughter . . . and there comes a cry within you—"For once, at least, let all these stars be bright—let all these flowers be fragrant—for my daughter!" And you consent to a crime which every fibre of your being approves, but which tomorrow society and your own conscience will condemn! But you feel yourself filled then with a strange satisfaction—a pride that is willing to lift its head in the face of condemnation, even at that horrible price which tomorrow you must pay! Yes, my dear Setti!—I know—there is no excuse for me. But extenuation—yes! I suppose I should have killed myself after that. But, no—one doesn't do that. On the morrow life is still there—life which, to subsist, needs all those things which we threw overboard in a moment of despair!—

Maurizio. I understand, Signora. And life needs above all else—life needs, just now, a little self-control—a little coolness. For you must surely realize that hitherto all three of you—you—Fabio, and the Signorina—have been listening too much to your feelings.

Maddalena. Yes—alas!—too much—too much!

Maurizio. Very well, then. From now on we must control ourselves, eh? We must take ourselves in hand, and be wise—listen to reason!

Maddalena. Yes—yes!

Maurizio. We are confronted with a situation which must be met. So, then—ah!—here is Fabio now!

Fabio (*entering from the Right, anguished, desperate, at his wits' end, appealingly to Signora Maddalena*): Oh, please—please—you go in to her! You go! And don't leave her to herself one moment!

Maddalena. Yes, yes—but it seems that—

Fabio. Oh, hurry—please!

Maddalena. Yes, yes! You will excuse me, Maurizio! (*Exit to the Right.*)

Maurizio. But, I say, Fabio—you seem a bit upset too!

Fabio. Oh, please, Maurizio—don't talk to me! You think you have found a way out, don't you! But do you know what you've done? I'll tell you. You have rouged the cheeks of a dying man in order to say—"How nice he looks!"

Maurizio. I?—I?

Fabio. Yes. You think you have solved it—but you haven't!

Maurizio. But I was just carrying out one of your ideas. Do me justice, man!—I'm not posing as a life-saver!

Fabio. It's agony, Maurizio—agony! Agony for that poor girl in there—and agony for myself! And do you know why, for myself? Because of this very remedy which you propose—a wise remedy, I grant you—but all the more terrible because it is so wise. And yet, on the other hand, it is an artificial remedy—all from the outside. It may save appearances—but nothing else!

Maurizio. Well, appearances are somthing, aren't they? If I remember rightly, a day or two ago you were groaning and tearing your hair because appearances could not be saved! Now that you have a chance to save them. . . .

Fabio. . . . I come face to face with my real anguish. That's natural, isn't it?

Maurizio. No, my dear fellow—because in this way you could not save appearances. Must we save appearances

above all else? Well, let us save appearances, then! You don't see yourself the way I see you. Now, I understand perfectly well! And I've got to shake you up somehow, make you rise to the occasion—paint the cheeks of the invalid, did you say? The man is here in town with me. If there is any reason to hurry—

Fabio. Yes—yes—but say . . . Well—after all, there is going to be no argument about it. You were careful to tell him that I am not going to pass over one penny of the property to him?

Maurizio. Yes—I told him that.

Fabio. And he agreed?

Maurizio. I said he was here in town, didn't I? There's one thing, however. In order to be free to fulfil all the obligations which he is assuming toward you—under the conditions you lay down—he asks—as I think he has a right to ask—that his own problems should be finally settled. He has a few debts!

Fabio. Big ones? And a great many, I suppose! Oh—I can imagine!

Maurizio. No—not so many, after all. Man alive! It seems to me you are asking for a good deal! However, he *has* a few debts. But I must add one thing—a point which he, notice, insisted on my mentioning—that if he has only a few debts, that fact is due not so much to his own good will as to his lack of credit!

Fabio. Pleasant news!

Maurizio. But he is honest, you must admit. The point he wants to make, probably, is that if ever he did have a little credit—

Fabio (*putting his two hands to his head*). Oh, please! —Please! Well, tell me what you said to the fellow. What does he look like? More or less out-at-elbows, I suppose.

Maurizio More or less. And I thought he had gone

downhill a bit since the first time I saw him. But we can fix that up. In fact, I have done something already in that direction myself. He is a queer chap. He's a man who attaches a great deal of importance to moral questions. And the wrong he sees himself forced to do—

Fabio. What is he—gambler?—blackmailer?—burglar?—what is he?

Maurizio. Gambler. However, he has not been able to gamble for some time. And he was sore about it, too, I can tell you. You see, I took a walk with him one night along the boulevard around the town. . . . Were you ever at Macerata?

Fabio. Never.

Maurizio. Well, I can assure you I'll never forget that walk. Like a page from some story-book—myriads of fireflies sparkling and rocketing through the trees, and, at my side, that man talking to me with the most terrifying frankness. His thoughts were like those fireflies, flashing before your mind in the most unexpected way, from the darkest depths of the soul. I felt—well—as though I were not walking on the solid earth, but in some dreamland—strange, mysterious, almost weird—a land where he was master, and where the most amazing and incredible things could happen, and at the same time seem quite commonplace and natural. He noticed my state of mind—oh, I can tell you, he notices everything! But he just smiled, and turned the conversation on Descartes—

Fabio (*in surprise*). On whom?

Maurizio. On Descartes. Because, you see, he is a man of some education, and of the most formidable erudition in philosophy. As for Descartes, he said—

Fabio. What, in God's name, do I care about what he said of Descartes!

Maurizio. Let me finish. What he said has some im-

portance to you, as you will see. He said that Descartes, in examining our sense of reality, made one of the most terrible discoveries that ever occurred to the human mind —namely, that if dreams were regular—that is the word he used—if our dreams were *regular,* we should never be able to distinguish between our sleeping and our waking moments. Now that's interesting! Did you never notice how strange it makes you feel, when a dream is repeated several times? You find it hard to realize that you are not confronted by reality itself. Because all our knowledge of the world hangs by this slender thread—the re-gu-la-ri-ty of our experiences. We, who are accustomed to such regularity, cannot imagine what things may seem quite natural and entirely real to a person who lives beyond all rules and regularities, as he does. Do you know, I found it extremely easy to make our proposal to him. He was talking of certain plans he had at the moment—plans that, to him, seemed as practicable as could be—while I thought them about the craziest things I had ever heard of. When I brought up our proposition—why, he thought it about the simplest and most obvious thing that could be imagined. And so reasonable, that he was surprised we had not thought of it sooner! You think that's strange? Let me tell you something else! *He* brought the money question up. *He* was the one who insisted—with some heat, besides—that there could be no question of money. He refused to listen to the most remote suggestion of money. And do you know why?

Fabio. Well, why?

Maurizio. Because, as he says, it is much easier to be a hero than it is to be an honest man. Anybody can be a hero once, he claims. But our problem is to be honest—honest at all times, and under all circumstances. And that is not easy.

Fabio. Ah! (*He begins to walk up and down the*

room, nervous, troubled, his face darkening.) A man of some talent, eh?

Maurizio. Loads and loads of talent.

Fabio. But it never got him anywhere much, eh?

Maurizio. No. He used himself very badly—oh, even as a boy. We went to school together—I think I told you. You'd have thought that a man of his brains could get almost anywhere. However he would study only what he wanted to—things that could not be of any possible use to him. And the reason was, he says, that education is the death of wisdom—because education makes us need so many things which, if we were really wise, we would do without. Came from a good family—plenty of money to spend—expensive tastes, easy habits, vices—then the usual case of hard luck—the family fortune going up in smoke. So there's little wonder—

Fabio (*as above*). A man—you said he was good-looking, didn't you?

Maurizio. Passable—passable. But what's the matter with you? (*He laughs.*) What's the idea? Are you beginning to be afraid I have chosen too well?

Fabio. If you please—Setti—the matter is . . . well . . . it seems to me we do have a little more than is really necessary here—good-breeding, talent, education—

Maurizio. But a philosophical education! And a little philosophy wouldn't hurt in a case like this, would it?

Fabio. Maurizio—please! This is no time for joking. You don't know how I feel! But to tell the truth, I should have asked for less. I would have been content with just an ordinary man—a good-natured, well-meaning fellow.

Maurizio. Who would at once give the game away, eh? Who would not quite look the part, eh? But one thing you seem to forget, my dear fellow. You have to consider the house into which this man would be coming. A mediocre

individual—especially one well along in years—would have looked suspicious. No, sir! For a case like this, you need a man of some parts—capable of inspiring respect and consideration, so that people can understand how a girl of Signorina Renni's connections could have selected a husband like that. And I am sure that—

Fabio. What are you sure of?

Maurizio. I am sure that she will accept him—in fact, that she will be grateful to me. A little more grateful, at least, than you appear to be.

Fabio. Yes—she will be grateful to you! I wish you had heard her talk just now! By the way, did you tell him we had to attend to the matter right away?

Maurizio. Of course I did. You'll see—he'll enter into the spirit of the thing.

Fabio. What do you mean by the spirit of the thing?

Maurizio. Well—so far as you will let him, that is.

The Maid (*hurrying in, from the Right*). Marquis Colli, the Signora would like to see you for a moment.

Fabio. But I can't—I have something to attend to with my cousin here. (*To Maurizio.*) I must have a talk with *him*. (*To the maid.*) Just tell Signora Renni that I am busy for the moment, and ask her if she will be good enough to wait.

The Maid. Yes, sir. (*She retires, Right.*)

Maurizio. It's just a step or two—in the hotel right here on this street. But are you going—in your present state of mind?

Fabio. Oh, I'm losing my mind! I'm losing my mind! There she is in there, weeping and crying and taking on, and here you are in here telling me—

Maurizio. But I'm not telling you anything! I've not made any definite arrangements. If you want to back out—

Fabio. What I want to do is *see* him, I tell you, and have a talk with him.

Maurizio. Very well, then—as I said, it's only a step or two.

Maddalena (*hurrying in, in great agitation*). Oh, Fabio—Fabio—please come! Don't leave me alone just now—please!

Fabio. I give up!

Maddalena. She's in a terrible condition, poor thing! Come—please—please!

Fabio. But I must—

Maurizio. Oh, there's no hurry—there's no hurry—you can stay here.

Maddalena. Oh, please stay, Fabio—

Maurizio. Why couldn't I bring him here? There's nothing to bind you. You can have a talk with him right here. (*Significantly.*) Perhaps it would be better for the young lady herself to . . .

Fabio. Yes—that's a good idea, perhaps. But—you understand, don't you?—nothing definite—at least, till he has talked with me. (*He hurries out, Right.*)

Maurizio (*calling after him*). I'll have him here in two minutes, so be ready! (*He withdraws, Rear.*)

Maddalena (*calling after him*). Him? Here? (*She starts toward the door on the Right, but she cencounters Agata and Fabio on the threshold.*)

Agata (*dishevelled, almost in hysterics, struggling to free herself from Fabio*). Let me alone! No! Let me alone! I'm going away!

Maddalena. But, my dear child—where are you going?

Agata. I don't know! I'm going away!

Fabio. Agata—Agata—please!

Maddalena. Are you crazy, child?

Agata. Let me alone! Crazy or not crazy—what dif-

ference does it make? I can die—that's all! There is no escape for me! Oh,—Mother!—Mother!—Mother!

Maddalena. But wait, my child. Wait till Fabio has seen him, at least, and had a talk with him. Wait till you have seen him yourself.

Agata. No! No! No! I can't! Don't you understand? I loathe him! Can't you see that you're trying to make me do something monstrous—monstrous!

Maddalena. But you asked us to, yourself, my child!

Agata. No!—I refuse—I refuse!

Fabio (*with desperate resolution*). So you say no! Very well—so do I! We both refuse! It *is* a monstrous thing! Revolting! Even to me. But tell me—are you brave enough to face the situation with me—your head high—without shame?

Maddalena. Oh, no, Fabio—what are you dreaming of? You are a man—and you can talk of facing a scandal. But we are women—and the disgrace would all fall on us! It's a question of choosing the worse of two evils—public disgrace for us all—

Agata (*breaking in*). . . . or a life of misery for me alone—that's it, isn't it? For me alone, you understand! Because I have got to live with the man, haven't I? I've got to live with him—a man who knows that what he is doing is a shameful thing! And who must be a worthless wretch to lend himself to such a thing! No—no—I refuse! I refuse even to see him! Let me go! Let me go!

Maddalena. But go where? What do you intend to do? Do you want a scandal? Very well! In that case I am ready—I—

Agata (*breaking into sobs and throwing her arms about her mother desperately*). For your sake, Mamma—for your sake—I will do anything!

Maddalena. For my sake? Not at all, my child. Why

for my sake? Don't worry about me. We can only try to help each other. There is no escape for any of us. We must remain here—all three of us. We must stand together, and each endure his share of the trouble. Because it belongs to all of us!

Agata. It isn't yours! It isn't yours, Mamma!

Maddalena. Yes, my child—I am more to blame than you—and I assure you I am suffering more than you!

Agata. No, Mamma. Because I am sorry also for your sake!

Maddalena. And I, only for your sake! And that is why it is so hard to bear. You are everything to me, my child—everything—everything! There's no one to help me bear this sorrow. But look, now, look—we must see—

Agata. It's horrible! Oh, it's horrible!

Maddalena. I know—but we must see the man first.

Agata. Oh, I can't Mamma—I can't, Mamma!

Maddalena. But we shall all be here. There's no trickery involved. We're not hiding anything—and we shall be right here—

Fabio. And I beside you.

Agata. But he will be here! Can you imagine that? Here! Always between us, Fabio! Here—in this house—a man who knows what we are hiding from other people!

Fabio. But he'll have plenty of reason to keep quiet on his own account. And he'll stick to his bargain. If he doesn't—all the better for us! The moment he gives the first indication of breaking his word, I—well—I'll find a way to get rid of him! Anyhow, we won't have to bother about him!

Maddalena. You see? Yes! So why do you say "always"? It may not be for a very long time.

Fabio. Call it a very short time! We will see to it that it is a very short time!

Agata. But we will be having him *here!*

Maddalena. But let us wait till we see who he is. Now, Setti has given his word that—

Fabio. Oh, we can fix everything—we can fix everything!

Maddalena. He is a very intelligent man, they say, and—(*There is a knock at the door, Rear. The three people look at each other in frightened anxiety.*) Ah! Here he is now! It must be he!

Agata (*jumping to her feet and clinging to her mother*). Let's go away, Mamma—oh, please!—let's go away! (*She drags her mother toward the door on the Right.*)

Maddalena. Yes—yes. Fabio will talk to him. We are going into the other room—Agata and I. (*They withdraw, Right.*)

Fabio. Come in.

The Maid (*opening the door, Rear, and announcing*). Signor Setti, with a gentleman!

Fabio. Show them in. (*The maid goes out.*)

Maurizio (*entering*). Ah! Here we are! Fabio, let me introduce you to a friend of mine—Signor Angelo Baldovino. (*Fabio bows.*) (*Maurizio to Baldovino.*) The Marquis Fabio Colli—my cousin! (*Baldovino bows.*)

Fabio. Won't you have a chair, sir?

Maurizio. You have something to say to each other, so I think I'll be going. (*To Baldovino, shaking his hand.*) And I'll see you later, at the hotel, eh? Good-bye, Fabio!

Fabio. Good-bye. (*Maurizio withdraws, Rear.*)

Baldovino (*seated in a chair, fits his glasses to his nose, leaning his head on the back of his chair*). First of all, I must ask a favor of you.

Fabio. Yes? What can I do for you?

Baldovino. I must ask you, Marquis, to be very very frank with me!

Fabio. Yes—indeed! In fact, I should like nothing better!

Baldovino. Thank you. But, I wonder—perhaps you don't understand the word frankness in just the way I understand it.

Fabio. Why, I imagine I do. Frankness—speaking out, as man to man! (*Baldovino shakes his head dubiously.*) No? What, then?

Baldovino. That is not sufficient. You see, it's this way, Marquis. Inevitably, try as we may, we make ourselves over. Let me explain. I come into this house, and right away—as far as you are concerned—I become the man that I am going to be—the man that I have the possibility of being. I make myself over—that is to say, I present myself to you in a manner adapted to the relationship I am about to establish with you. And you do the same as regards me. But, after all, behind these two fictions which we set one opposite the other—behind the closed doors and the drawn shutters, so to speak, we keep our most secret thoughts, our most intimate feelings, hidden—everything, in short, that we are for ourselves outside the relationship which we intend to establish. Have I made myself clear?

Fabio. Oh, yes—yes—perfectly clear—perfectly! My cousin told me that you are a very intelligent man.

Baldovino. I see. And I suppose you imagine I have been trying to give you a sample of my intelligence.

Fabio. No, No! I don't mean that. I agree heartily with all that you have so very well said.

Baldovino. In that case, then, if you will permit me, I will begin to be quite frank with you. I must tell you, Marquis, that for some time—inside here—I have been feeling an unspeakable disgust for the miserable fictions I have to put forward in the relations I am forced to contract with people who are like myself—if you will pardon the comparison.

Fabio. How could that offend anyone?

Baldovino. I see myself as I am. I am always seeing myself as I am, Marquis. And I say to myself—"How cowardly—how mean and base, is this thing you are now doing!"

Fabio (*disconcerted and embarrassed*). Oh, I wonder now—hardly that! Why?

Baldovino. Why? Because it is. You, at the very least, might ask me why in the world I am doing it, then. Well, I am doing it because, partly through my own fault, partly through the fault of other people—at any rate, through the pressure of circumstances—I cannot do otherwise. It is an easy matter, Marquis, to wish that we were like this or like that. But the real question is, whether we can be what we would like to be. It is not a question of ourselves alone, you see—but also of the beast in us—or rather, the beast that we are riding. Club this beast all you want to—he is never reduced to discipline. You just try to keep a donkey from walking on the edge of a precipice! You can pull at the bridle—you can use the whip—you can tighten the bit—but he goes, just the same, because—ass that he is!—he cannot help it. And after you have beaten him up pretty badly, you look at his reproachful eyes, and I ask you: aren't you just a little bit sorry?—I don't say you forgive him. To forgive a donkey, you have to be a bit of a donkey yourself. But pity for him—that is another question, don't you think?

Fabio. Yes—quite so—quite so. But we have a number of things to talk over—so if you don't mind—

Baldovino. I am talking them over. I have been saying all this so that you might understand that, along with a keen realization of what I am doing, I have also a certain self-respect which I must be careful to maintain. And I can so maintain it only by speaking with absolute frankness. Deception would be horrible in this case—not to say ugly—cheap—

common—something quite beneath us. The truth, therefore!

Fabio. Yes—the truth! Everything clear! We must try to come to an understanding.

Baldovino. So, then—if you will allow me—I will ask you—

Fabio. Ask me?—

Baldovino. Yes—a few questions, if you don't mind.

Fabio. Very well—go ahead!

Baldovino. Now, let's see—(*He takes a notebook from an inside pocket.*) I have jotted down here the bald facts of the situation. In a serious matter like this—well—better for you, and better for me! (*He opens the notebook, and turns the pages over one by one. Finally, he begins to put his questions in the manner of a cross-examiner, though not a harsh one.*) You, Signor Marchese, if I am not mistaken, are the lover of the young lady?

Fabio (*breaking in to side-track that question, and any further such, from the notebook*). Not at all—I beg your pardon. That is hardly—

Baldovino (*smiling, unembarrassed*). So you see? You balk at the very first question!

Fabio. Of course I do! Because—

Baldovino (*sharply*). So you are not the lover of the young lady? You deny that? Oh, in that case—(*He rises.*) —in that case, you must excuse me, Marquis. I told you that I must keep my own self-respect. I could not possibly lend myself to a crooked, a humiliating, deal.

Fabio. What do you mean? I'm sure that going about the matter as you are trying to do—

Baldovino. You are quite mistaken. My self-respect—my dignity—such dignity as I may have—I can save only on condition that you speak as frankly with me as you would with your own conscience. Either that way, Marquis, or

not at all. I will have nothing to do with evasions that are beneath me. The truth, therefore! Do you care to answer?

Fabio. Very well. . . . Yes, I am the lover of the young lady! But for heaven's sake, drop that notebook! I suppose you are referring to Signorina Agata Renni?

Baldovino (*relentlessly continuing the hunt in his notebook. He finds a certain page. He stops, and repeats*). Yes —Agata Renni—exactly. Twenty-seven?

Fabio. Twenty-six.

Baldovino (*looks at his notebook again*). Yes—but she was twenty-six on the ninth of last month. Put it this way—in her twenty-seventh year; and—(*Looking at his notebook again.*) there seems to be a mother.

Fabio. But what in the world?—

Baldovino. Just conscientiousness, you understand—just conscientiousness on my part—to convince you that I mean business. You will find me always just as precise, Signor Marchese!

Fabio. Very well!—yes—there is a mother.

Baldovino. How old is she, may I ask?

Fabio. Oh, I don't know—perhaps fifty-one—perhaps fifty-two.

Baldovino. As young as that? You see, the point is this—I am speaking quite frankly—it would be almost better if she didn't figure in the case at all. This mother is a fiction that will never be reducible! However, I knew about her. So—we had better be liberal, eh? Let's put it fifty-three. And you, Signor Marchese, must be about my age—I look older than I really am—never took care of myself. I am forty-one.

Fabio. Oh, in that case, I am older than you. I am forty-three.

Baldovino. Congratulations! You don't show it. However, perhaps I can brace up a bit—enough to get along. So,

then—forty-three. Now, I'm sorry—but I shall have to touch on a very delicate matter—

Fabio. My wife?

Baldovino. You are not living with her—the fault—that I know. You are a perfect gentleman. And, in this world, the man who is unable to down others is bound to be downed himself. So, then, your wife's fault. And you have been finding your consolation here. But life—a greedy money-lender—collects a hundred in interest for every dollar of joy she lends!

Fabio. Alas!

Baldovino. Oh—perhaps I don't know! So you, Marquis, have got to pay for this consolation of yours! You are faced with the threat of a protest on sight. I endorse your note, and assume the obligation of paying. You cannot imagine what a satisfaction it is for me, Signor Marchese, to do this spite to a society which has denied all credit to my signature! I write my name down here, and I say: Look! Here is a man who has taken from life something he had no title to. And I—beggar that I am—pay his bill! For if I did not pay it, a reputation would be ruined—the honor of a family would go bankrupt. Signor Marchese, it is a matter of pride—of satisfaction—of revenge for me. And, believe me, pride, satisfaction, revenge are my only motives! You are not convinced of that? You have every right to doubt. Because, in this case, I am like . . . Will you allow me to make a comparison? . . .

Fabio. Why not? Please—please—

Baldovino (*continuing*). I am like a person trying to circulate gold money in a country that has never seen anything but paper. People are inclined to suspect that gold, are they not? It is quite natural. Well, you are certainly tempted to refuse it here. But it's gold, Signor Marchese, I assure you—pure gold—the only gold, by the way, I have

never been able to spend, because I have it inside me—in my soul, and not in my pockets. If I had it in my pockets—

Fabio. I understand. So then, this . . . However, I am not going to pry into your affairs, Signor Baldovino . . . Honesty—reliability—good faith—

Baldovino. There are traditions in my family, too, Signor Marchese. It cost me a great deal in terms of pride, bitterness, disgust, self-reproach, to be dishonest. Can honesty cost me any more than that? You are inviting me—how shall I say?—to a double wedding. On the one hand, I shall pretend to marry a woman—but there will be no pretense about my marriage to honesty!

Fabio. Exactly. And that's enough—I am satisfied with just that.

Baldovino. Satisfied? You think you are satisfied? But, Signor Marchese, how about the consequences?

Fabio. What consequences? I don't understand.

Baldovino. Oh, I can see that you—certainly because you are in great distress here with me—and you are using great violence upon yourself to bear up in this painful situation—are treating certain matters with the greatest haste—just for the sake of being through with it all.

Fabio. Haste? Not at all—not at all! Quite the contrary! I am in deadly earnest!

Baldovino. May I ask a question? Honesty . . . Signor Marchese,—must I, or must I not, be honest?

Fabio. You must, of course. That is the one condition I insist on.

Baldovino. Very well. Honesty, then—in my feelings—in my intentions—in everything I do. Well—I am honest. This honesty I feel in my intentions, and I will prove it in my acts. Well, then, what?

Fabio. Well, then—what? I told you that I am satisfied.

Baldovino. But the consequences, Marquis! The con-

sequences! See here. This honesty you are expecting from me—what is it? Just consider. Nothing—an abstraction—mere form! Let us use the real term: honesty in the absolute! But, excuse me—if I am to be honest in this way, I must live this honesty. I must live—so to speak—this abstraction—give matter to this form—make this absolute honesty concrete. And the consequence, first of all—to take only one of them, notice—is that I shall have to be a tyrant!

Fabio. A tyrant?

Baldovino. Necessarily! Not because I should like to be. A tyrant, I mean, as regards mere form—understand. The rest does not concern me. But as regards form—to be honest, as you would have me, and as I would have myself, I must necessarily be a tyrant—of that I warn you. I shall have to insist on a most scrupulous respect for appearances, and this will demand most onerous sacrifices from the young lady, and from her mother—a very galling restriction on *your* freedom—a very meticulous regard for all the abstract formulæ of social life. Let us be absolutely clear, Signor Marchese. Just so you will realize that I have the most upright and earnest intentions: do you know what will be the immediate outcome of all this—something which we cannot avoid, and which everyone will see? It's this—and let there be no mistake about it . . . that, in dealing with me—honest, as I shall be—it is you, and not I, who are doing the wrong! In all this situation—which is not an attractive one, I assure you—I see only one thing: the chance which you offer me, and which I accept—of being honest!

Fabio. Well, my dear sir—you understand—in fact, you have already said as much yourself—I am not in a state of mind where I can follow you easily just at this moment. You talk fluently, I know—but let's come down to solid earth—let us come down to something definite, please—

Baldovino. Solid earth? Definite? Ah—that, I cannot!

Fabio. What do you mean—you cannot? How is that?

Baldovino. Why, I cannot, because of the very circumstances in which you place me, Signor Marchese. I must keep to abstractions, perforce! Once I touch the solid earth, I am done for! Reality is not for me—you are keeping that for yourself! So *you* come down to the solid earth—*you* talk for a while. And I will listen to you. I will be the intelligence which does not forgive—but which pities!

Fabio (*speaking up quickly, and pointing to himself*). So I am the donkey, I suppose?

Baldovino. Not by any fault of mine—just by the logic of the situation!

Fabio. Yes—yes—after all, you are right! Just so. So, then, I will say something—the donkey talking in his own donkey way, of course! You will listen, and have pity on me! However, to come to an understanding—

Baldovino. An understanding with me, do you mean?

Fabio. With you, of course—who else?

Baldovino. No, Signor Marchese—your problem is to come to an understanding with yourself. I, for my part, see the whole thing clearly. I have talked so much—and, you know, I am not much of a talker, after all; I have talked so much, because I wanted you to understand everything clearly.

Fabio. I?

Baldovino. You—you! So far as I am concerned, it's all very simple. What have I to do? Nothing! I am playing the part of pure form in this case. The act itself—not a very agreeable one—*you* are committing—or, rather, you have already committed it—and I am saving the situation; you will continue to commit it—and I will keep it out of sight! But to keep it out of sight, in your own interest, and especially in the interest of the young lady, it will be absolutely necessary that you should respect me—something that

will not be easy in the rôle you are reserving for yourself. Respect, not so much me, I should say, as the form—the form which I represent—the form of a respectable husband married to a respectable lady! You refuse to respect that form?

Fabio. Of course—of course I will respect it.

Baldovino. And don't you understand that that form will be all the more severe and tyrannical, in proportion as you wish my honesty to be real? You see, I told you to beware of the consequences—not so much on my account as on your own! I—look here—I have my philosophy to fall back on. To save my dignity, in these circumstances, I shall be satisfied to see in the woman who is to be mine in name—a mother!

Fabio. Exactly—quite so.

Baldovino. And to look at my relationship to her through this child which is to come—through, in other words, the function which it will be my duty to fulfil—a noble, a thoroughly respectable function, wholly measured by the innocence of that future child—boy or girl, as it may be. Is that all right?

Fabio. Quite all right! Quite all right!

Baldovino. Quite all right for me, notice—but not for you! I warn you, Marquis—the more you approve, the more trouble you make for yourself!

Fabio. How is that? How is that? I can't see all the difficulties that you seem to see!

Baldovino. I think it is my duty to point them out to you, Signor Marchese! You are a gentleman. Unfortunate circumstances are compelling you to do something that is not quite respectable. But you cannot dispense with respectability—and so true is this that, when you cannot find this respectability in what you are doing, you try to find it in me. So I become the representative of your respectability! I must be a respectable husband of a respectable woman who cannot

be my wife—the respectable father of a child who cannot be my child. Is not that so?

Fabio. Yes—yes—quite so!

Baldovino. But if this woman belongs to you, and not to me—if the child is yours, and not mine—can't you see that you cannot possibly leave all the honesty to me? You will have to be honest too, Signor Marchese. You will have to be honest toward me! There is no escape! If I am honest—everybody must be honest. There is no escape!

Fabio. How is that? How is that? I don't understand—wait just a moment! . . .

Baldovino. Ah! So the ground is giving away under your feet?

Fabio. No—I don't say that—I say—if the conditions are to be changed . . .

Baldovino. They *must* be changed—you are the one who's changing them! The appearances that must be saved, Signor Marchese, are not for others only. There is one here for you people, as well—one which you will have to assume, and which I, for my part, will have to reduce to something tangible: your honesty—the honesty of you people. Are you thinking of that? I warn you, it is not an easy thing!

Fabio. But since you know, already—

Baldovino. But it is precisely because I do know. I am speaking against my own interests. But I cannot help doing so, just the same. I advise you to think it over carefully, Signor Marchese—(*A pause. Fabio rises and begins to walk hurriedly up and down the room in utter consternation. Baldovino rises also, and stands waiting.*)

Fabio (*without stopping*). Of course, you understand that if I—

Baldovino. Yes—but it will be much better if you think it all over more carefully. And, if you think it best, report what I have said to the young lady (*He gives a rapid glance*

toward the door to the Right.) . . . unless, perchance, that should not be necessary!

Fabio (*turning on him angrily*). What do you mean by that?

Baldovino (*without losing his temper, a look of sadness imprinted on his face*). Oh, natural, isn't it—after all? Anyhow, I will be going. You can give me—or send me—your decision at my hotel. (*He starts to withdraw, but at the door he turns.*) Meantime, Signor Marchese, you and the young lady may rest assured that this whole matter is strictly confidential.

Fabio. I am counting on your discretion.

Baldovino (*slowly, earnestly*). For my part, there are many things on my conscience. And here, in my eyes, there is a question not of guilt, but only of misfortune. Whatever be your decision, rest assured that I shall always be grateful, secretly grateful to my old schoolmate for his having thought me worthy of approaching—honestly approaching—this misfortune! . . . (*He bows.*) . . . Signor Marchese!

Curtain

ACT II

A luxurious drawing-room in the Baldovino mansion. Side doors to the Right and Left. General entrance Rear. Some of the articles of furniture seen in the Renni parlor in the first act have been moved here.

As the curtain rises, Marchetto Fongi is standing with his hat and cane in one hand, and holding the door on the Left open with the other. He is talking to Baldovino, who cannot be seen. Fabio stands near by, expectant, like a person anxious not be seen nor heard.

FONGI (*talking through the door*). Thank you, Baldovino —thanks. Yes—you cannot imagine me missing such a pleasant occasion, can you? Thanks—I'll be here. And I'll bring some of the Directors—within half an hour, say. So, good-bye, for the moment! (*Closing the door, and turning toward Fabio, who steps up to him on tiptoe, giving a slight wink of understanding.*)

FABIO (*whispering, and anxiously*). Really? You think he will?

FONGI (*answering first with a nod, winking and keeping his eye and face in that expression*). He fell into it—he took the bait!

FABIO. I think so, too. It has been nearly a week now.

FONGI (*holding up three fingers of one hand, and moving them*). Three hundred thousand lire. Didn't I tell you so? It couldn't fail. (*He locks arms with the Marquis, and turns with him toward the door, Rear.*) It will be something worth seeing! You just leave it to me—you just leave it

to me! And we'll catch him with the goods! (*Fongi and Fabio disappear through the door, Rear.*)

The stage is vacant for a time. Finally, the door, Left, opens, and Baldovino and Maurizio Setti appear.

Maurizio (*surveying the room*). But you—old man—you've got things mighty well fixed up here!

Baldovino (*inattentive*). Yes. (*Then with an ambiguous smile.*) Quite respectable, aren't we? (*A pause.*) But tell me—where have you been all this time?

Maurizio. Oh—going around from one place to another—a little off the beaten track, however.

Baldovino. You?

Maurizio. Why, are you surprised? Don't you believe me?

Baldovino. Off the beaten track! Which means, not Paris, not Monte Carlo, not Cairo—where have you been?

Maurizio. In the land of rubber and bananas!

Baldovino. The Congo—for a guess!

Maurizio. The Congo! And right out in the jungle, too, you know—the real jungle.

Baldovino. Ah-ha! See any big game?

Maurizio. Saw a few savages—

Baldovino. No—I wasn't joking—I meant big game. A tiger or two—lions—

Maurizio. Nothing so exciting as that, thank you. But, heavens, man! what a queer look you have on your face!

Baldovino (*smiling bitterly, crooking the fingers of one of his hands, and scratching the air in Maurizio's direction*). We have come down to this, you know—if we cut our nails, it is not to keep from scratching, but just for the sake of appearances. The war we are waging here is a much more pitiless and ferocious one than those our ancestors in the jungle fought with their bare claws. That's why I've

always been envious of wild animals. And you, unlucky rascal, have been clear to Darkest Africa without so much as seeing a rattlesnake!

Maurizio. Come, come, old man—tell me—how are things going?

Baldovino. What things?

Maurizio. Oh, you know—the young lady—your wife, I mean.

Baldovino. Her health is very good — getting along wonderfully!

Maurizio. But, I mean—how are you getting on with her?

Baldovino (*looks at him for a moment, then rising*). What can you expect?

Maurizio (*changing tone*). But it seems to agree with you, you know.

Baldovino. Yes—I am very busy.

Maurizio. So they say. I hear Fabio has started a new corporation.

Baldovino. Yes—to get me into hot water. And he is doing well.

Maurizio. You are the General Manager?

Baldovino. That's why he is doing well!

Maurizio. Yes—so I hear. I would like to take a few shares myself. But they say you are a terrible taskmaster!

Baldovino. You bet I am! And I'm not taking a cent that doesn't belong to me! (*He approaches Maurizio, and rests both his hands upon his arm.*) Just imagine! Hundreds of thousands—right here in my hands! Free to think of them as so much waste paper—not to need money for once—even in the slightest way!

Maurizio. Yes—it must be a great pleasure for you.

Baldovino. It's something divine! And every guess

coming out, you know! But we have to work—and they all have to do as I say.

Maurizio. Yes—that's the very point! . . .

Baldovino. They don't like it, eh? Complaints, I suppose. They are fretting under the bit, eh?

Maurizio. They say—they say you might be a little . . . a little less conscientious—there!

Baldovino. Oh, I know. I pile it on to them. I break their backs—everybody who comes near me! But you understand—I can't help it. For the past ten months I haven't been myself. I haven't been even a man!

Maurizio. No? And what are you, then?

Baldovino. I just told you—a divinity—a god, practically. You ought to be able to understand. You see, I don't exist except for appearances. I have taken a plunge into arithmetic—into a sea of zeros—the zeros of millions. All other people's money, to be sure—not a cent belongs to me. And I won't have it any other way. Here I live, in this beautiful house, but I scarcely see or feel or hear anything. Sometimes I am surprised at the sound of my own voice, or at the squeak of my own shoes, or at noticing that I need a drink of water, or that I need to go to bed! I am living, you see, de-li-ciously, in the absolute of a pure abstract form!

Maurizio. You ought to feel just a little sorry for ordinary mortals who—

Baldovino. I do—I do. I am sorry for them. Sorry is just the word! But I can't help it. I have to keep them in line—every one of them. But I said I was going to, you know. I warned your cousin, the Marquis, in advance. And I'm sticking to my part of the bargain.

Maurizio. But you seem to be taking a devilish delight in it all!

Baldovino. Devilish? No—not exactly devilish. Living between heaven and earth as I am, I have squatted com-

fortably on a cloud! Not devilish! It's the joy you see on the faces of the saints in church paintings!

Maurizio. But I hope you realize things can't go on this way very long!

Baldovino. Oh, I know! It will have to end sometime —and perhaps very soon. But they had better look out! It's important to see how the end is going to come. (*He looks at Maurizio fixedly.*) I say this in their interest. You had better tip your cousin off! I have an impression that he is trying to get rid of me a little *too* soon! You seem worried—have you noticed something yourself?

Maurizio. No—nothing at all!

Baldovino. Oh, come now—be quite frank! I won't lay it up against them, notice. After all, it's very natural—it's only human nature that they—

Maurizio. I assure you that I've heard nothing at all. I have had a talk with Signora Maddalena. Fabio I have not yet seen.

Baldovino. Oh, I see through it! Both of them—the mother and your cousin, thought like this: "We'll get the girl married, *pro forma.* Then, after a time, we'll get rid of him on one pretext or another." That, in fact, was the best they could hope for, wasn't it? *But such a thing they cannot hope for!* They were most lamentably superficial, even on this point—*even on this point!*

Maurizio. But you are imagining that! Who told you such a thing?

Baldovino. So true is it, that they posited my honesty as a fundamental condition!

Maurizio. So—you see!

Baldovino. What a simpleton you are! Logic is one thing, my dear boy—but people are something else again. Now, you can, in perfect logic, propose one thing; but inside —in your heart—intend another. Now, of course, I could

lend myself, even now, by a sacrifice on my own part, to doing something that would please him and the old lady—furnish them with a pretext for getting rid of me. But let them not hope for any such thing! Because I—yes—I can do such a thing—but I won't do such a thing—for them! I won't do it—because they are *absolutely unable* to wish me to do it!

Maurizio. Upon my word, you are a terrible person! Why, you deny them even the possibility of wanting you to commit a crime?

Baldovino. See here: Supposing I agree! At first, they would be much relieved. They would be freed from the annoyance of my presence. They can imagine that the honesty which failed to materialize in me, has remained, if not wholly, at least in part, with them. The girl will be left a legal wife, separated from an unworthy husband, and, in this unworthiness of the husband—young girl as she is—she will have an excuse for finding consolation from an old friend of the family. What was not permissible in an unmarried girl will easily be condoned in a married woman, freed from the obligations of conjugal fidelity. You see? I, accordingly, in my position as husband, could easily be dishonest, and bring about a separation. But I did not enter this house as a husband only. In fact, I would never have come here as a simple husband. There would have been no need of me in such a case. The need of me arose from the fact that this husband was shortly to become a father also. Shortly—I mean, within a probable time! No—a father was needed here. And this father—father, notice, in *his* interests—in the interests of the Marquis—must necessarily be honest, because, though I might as a husband go away without doing any damage to my wife, who could drop my name and resume her own—as a father, any wrong I might do would perforce fall upon my child, who can bear

no other name but mine; and the lower I fall, the lower he falls, too. And this is something which your cousin can absolutely *not* desire!

Maurizio. Yes—you are right!

Baldovino. So, you see then? Oh—as for falling—I can fall! You know me perfectly well! To get satisfaction for the wrong they would do me in driving me away in disgrace, I could insist on taking the child, which legally belongs to me. I could leave the boy here two or three years, for them to get really fond of him; then I could prove that my wife is cohabiting with a lover, and I could take the child away from them—dragging him down with me—lower and lower and lower. You know, there is a horrible beast in me—a beast from which I have tried to free myself by chaining it up here in the terms of this bargain which has been offered me. It is in their interest that these terms be respected, as I have solemnly decided that they shall be. Because, once those restraints were broken, I cannot tell where I might end, today or tomorrow. (*Suddenly changing tone.*) However—never mind. Tell me: they sent you to me, didn't they—the moment you got here? Come, now! What were you going to ask of me? Be quick, please, if you don't mind. (*He looks at his watch.*) I have given you more time than I ought. You knew we were baptizing the child this morning? And just before lunch I have a meeting with the Board of Directors. You come from the Marquis—from the old lady?

Maurizio. Yes. You see, it's about the baptism of the little fellow. His name, in the first place. Now, the name you want—

Baldovino. Oh, I know.

Maurizio. But, tell me—don't you think—

Baldovino. Oh, I know—poor little devil! He's too small for such a big name—almost more than he can carry!

Maurizio. Sigismondo!

Baldovino. But that's a name traditional in my family —that was my father's name—that was my grandfather's name.

Maurizio. That argument doesn't have much weight in their eyes, you understand!

Baldovino. But I don't like it either, you know. Ugly —absurdly long—especially for a tot his size. But is it my fault? I will say even this: (*In a very low voice*) that if this boy were my own child, I would probably not have given him that particular name.

Maurizio. Ah!—So you see, eh?

Baldovino. See what? I should think you would see that in the circumstances I cannot possibly avoid the name! It's the same old story—it's a question of appearances—of form. No—it's not from any preference of mine—but good form requires it. Since I must give him a name, I can give him only this one. And it is useless, quite useless, for them to insist. I am sorry—but I can't budge an inch. And you may tell them just that. . . . And why are they always distracting me from my work with nonsense like this? I'm sorry, old man—my welcome may seem a trifle cold—but I must return to business. So, good-bye, eh?—I hope I'll see you again soon. (*He shakes hands hastily, and withdraws through the door, Left. Maurizio stands there for some time, looking at the closed door, as though he did not know what to make of it. Finally, the door on the Right softly opens, and first Signora Maddalena, and then Fabio, advance cautiously, as though waiting for an important piece of news. Maurizio looks at them, scratching the back of his head. Maddalena and Fabio nod to him questioningly, the Marquis sullen and frowning, the woman almost tearful. Maurizio shakes his head, finally shrugging his shoulders and opening his arms in a gesture of helplessness. Madda-*

lena falls into a chair, crushed, despondent, and sits there for some time in that pose. Fabio also takes a chair, but with a demeanor of protest, his fists clenched aggressively on his knees. Maurizio stands nodding meditatively, and finally sits down also, with a noisy sigh through his nostrils, which finds an echo in an equally despairing grunt which Fabio blows through his closed lips. This by-play continues—a sigh from Maurizio, a grunt from Fabio. Maddalena neither sighs nor grunts, but looks first at one and then at the other, her head shaking disconsolately, and the corners of her mouth drawing down at each sigh and grunt, respectively. Finally, Fabio jumps to his feet, and begins to pace up and down the room, opening and clenching his fists in rage. Somewhat later Maurizio rises, steps over toward Maddalena and holds out his hand to take his leave.)

Maddalena (*taking his hand, but in a plaintive voice*). You are going?

Fabio (*turning, angrily*). Well, let him go! I don't know how he ever had the face to show himself in this house again, anyhow! (*To Maurizio.*) A pretty mess you've made of things! (*He resumes his frantic promenade.*)

Maurizio (*finding nothing to say, glances pleadingly at Fabio, without releasing Maddalena's hand; then in a low voice*). The young lady?

Maddalena (*softly and plaintively*). She is in the other room, attending to the baby.

Maurizio (*still without releasing Maddalena's hand, and also in a low voice*). Please give her my regards—(*He raises Maddalena's hand to his lips and kisses it. Then he repeats his gesture of helplessness, opening his arms.*)—and ask her to forgive me!

Maddalena. Oh—she, at least, now, has her baby!

Fabio (*without interrupting his promenade*). Yes—and lots of consolation the baby will be for her, the moment *he* begins asserting his authority over it!

Maddalena. Yes—that's what I'm afraid of!

Fabio (*without stopping*). He has begun already—on the question of the name!

Maddalena (*to Maurizio*). Why, for ten months we haven't dared say our soul's our own!

Fabio (*without stopping*). And imagine the kind of training he will prescribe for—*Sigismondo!*

Maddalena. It's terrible! You have no idea! Why, we dare not even read a newspaper!

Maurizio. Really? How's that?

Maddalena. Heaven knows! He has ideas of his own about the press!

Maurizio. Is he cross, around the house? Bad-mannered?

Maddalena. Worse than that: his manners are perfect! He says the sharpest things in such a way—and he backs them up with such unexpected arguments! As you listen you think they are unanswerable—and we always do what he says in the end! He's a perfectly frightful person, Setti—perfectly frightful! I don't dare draw a breath!

Maurizio. Oh, my dear Signora—what can I say? How can you ever forgive me! I could never have dreamed—

Fabio. Oh! Please go away! Please go away! I can't leave myself, at this moment, because we are going to have the baptism soon. Otherwise I would clear out! So you do me the favor! Can't you see I don't want your apologies? Can't you see I'm sick and tired of the sight of you?

Maurizio. Yes—you're quite right. I'll go—I'll go.

The Butler (*opening the door, Rear, and announcing*). The Rector of St. Martha's!

Maddalena (*rising*). Show him in. (*The butler retires.*)

Maurizio. So, then, I will be going, Signora Maddalena.

Maddalena. Must you go?—Won't you stay for the ceremony? I'm sure Agata would like to have you. Anyhow, drop in and see us once in a while—I'm sure you can help us. (*Maurizio again opens his arms, bows to Maddalena, looks in Fabio's direction, but dares not open his mouth. He withdraws through the door, Rear, bowing on the threshold to the Rector, who is just entering in the wake of the Butler. Maurizio and the Butler retire—the latter closing the door as he goes out.*)

Maddalena. I'm so glad to see you, Father! Won't you have a chair?

The Rector. And how are you, Signora—how are you?

Fabio. Good morning, Father!

The Rector. Good morning, Marquis!—Well, Signora, I have come to make arrangements—

Maddalena. Very kind of you, Father—very kind of you. The assistant you sent has just been here.

The Rector. Ah! That's nice!

Maddalena. Yes. And we have everything arranged in the other room. He brought all the things from the Church. And the altar is perfectly lovely—you've no idea! You must come in and see it!

The Rector. And the young lady?

Maddalena. Yes—I will send for her.

The Rector. Oh, not if she is busy! I just wanted to know whether she was doing well . . .

Maddalena. Oh, yes—she is getting along splendidly—very much taken up with the baby, of course.

The Rector. Yes—I can well imagine!

Maddalena. You can hardly drag her away!

The Rector. And you, Marquis, I suppose, are to act as godfather?

Fabio. Yes—quite so.

Maddalena. And I will stand as godmother.

The Rector. Oh, I took that for granted! Now—baby's name—you have decided upon that, I suppose?

Maddalena (*with a deep sigh*). Unfortunately!

Fabio (*with a deep sigh*). Unfortunately!

The Rector. Oh, I don't know—after all—Sigismondo! —Sigismondo was the name of a fine saint! He was a king, in fact. You see, I usually read up about the saints—

Maddalena. Yes—that we know. Everybody says you are a wonderful scholar!

The Rector. No—no—I cannot pretend to that! But I do like to read. Now, St. Sigismund was king of Burgundy, and he married Amalberga, daughter of Theodoric. However, she died after a time. And he was unlucky enough to marry one of her ladies-in-waiting—a treacherous hussy—who put him up to the most shameful crimes—among them one against his own son!

Maddalena. Heavens, Father!—You don't say so! His own son! What did he do to the boy?

The Rector. Choked him to death!

Maddalena (*almost screaming at Fabio*). Do you hear that?

The Rector (*quickly*). But he was sorry afterwards, you know—repented right away. And to atone for his crime, he gave himself up to the most rigorous discipline, retiring to a monastery, dressing in sackcloth and ashes . . . And his humility and resignation on the scaffold caused him to be honored as a martyr.

Maddalena. You mean to say he was executed?

The Rector (*closes his eyes, stretches his neck full length, bends his head forward, and, striking the back of his neck with the edge of his open hand, makes the gesture of decapitation*). In the year 524, if I remember rightly!

Fabio. I agree with you—a fine saint! Chokes his own

son to death, and dies a murderer on a scaffold! *Sigismondo!*

The Rector. Yes—but oftentimes the greatest sinners become the holiest saints. Besides, this Sigismund was a very wise man, you know. He was the author of the Burgundian Code—the famous *Lex Gombetta*—at least, according to one theory he is the author of it. Savigny says so, and when Savigny says a thing, you can rely on its being right.

Maddalena. Well, Father—the only comfort I take in the name is that I can call him "Dino"—*Sigismondino.*

The Rector. There you have it!—Dino! Splendid, isn't it! Goes well with a little fellow, eh? Dino! Pretty name, isn't it, Marquis?

Maddalena. Yes—but who knows if *he* will let us call him Dino?

Fabio. Yes—who knows?

The Rector. Well, after all, if Signor Baldovino insists on the name his father had, we shall have to consent, shan't we? In any event, what time shall we set for the ceremony?

Maddalena. *He* will decide that too, Father. Just a moment, please! (*She pushes a button on the wall.*) I will send for him, if you will wait. (*The Butler enters from the door, Rear.*) Will you please tell Signor Baldovino that the Rector is here? Ask him to step in a moment, if he can. He is in the other room. (*She points to the door, Left. The Butler bows, crosses the stage, knocks at the door, opens, and goes in.*)

Baldovino (*hurrying in through the door*). Oh—the Rector! So very kind of you to call, Father! A great courtesy you are doing us! No, no—please—keep your seat—keep your seat!

The Rector. The honor is mine! Thank you, Signor Baldovino. Sorry if we are disturbing you!

Baldvino. Why, the idea! I am delighted to have you calling here. And what can I do for you?

The Rector. Why—for me? Er—er—why, we wanted to fix the hour for the ceremony . . .

Boldovino. That is for you to decide, Father. Any time you say. The godmother is here—the godfather is here—the second godmother, I believe, is in the other room. I am ready myself—the Church is just a step away—

Maddalena (*in astonishment*). What did you say?

Fabio (*hardly able to control himself*). What did you say?

Baldovino (*turning toward them, apparently unable to understand*). Why?

The Rector (*speaking up*). Why, it's this way, Signor Baldovino. We had arranged—but how is this? Do you mean you didn't know?

Maddalena. We have arranged everything in the other room!

Baldovino. Arranged everything? What have you arranged?

The Rector. Why, for the baptism. We were going to celebrate it here—to give the ceremony a more attractive—a more intimate touch!

Fabio. The Rector sent all the things over from the Church.

Baldovino. To make the ceremony more attractive? Excuse me, Father—I can hardly imagine you saying such a thing. . . .

The Rector. Why, it's this way: we often do such things in town, you know, as a favor to people of real distinction. We often have such services at home.

Baldovino (*smiling innocently*). People of distinction? But, Father, I should think you would prefer to insist on that humility which recognizes no distinctions before God!

Maddalena. I cannot see how a baptism at home implies any disrespect to religion!

Fabio. This is too much! You seem to take a delight in just blocking everything that other people propose. And I find it strange that you—you, above all others—should mix in such matters, and try to preach to other people!

Baldovino. Now—now, my dear Marquis—please don't set me going! Do you want my profession of faith?

Fabio. No! I don't want anything from you!

Baldovino. If you are thinking this is just hypocrisy, on my part—

Fabio. I didn't say it was hypocrisy—I just said it was a nuisance!

Baldovino. Do you pretend to know how I feel about such things? How can you? However, I suppose you are imagining that from my point of view I ought not to attach any importance to this ceremony which all of you, nevertheless, insist on having. Very well! But I insist on it, all the more, for that very reason! This ceremony is not for me, but for the child; and I agree, I recognize—as you agree and recognize—that the ceremony must be gone through with for him. Accordingly, I insist that it be celebrated in due form! I insist that this child, without claiming any privilege which might do offence to the very ceremony we are imposing upon him for his sake, should go to the church—to the baptismal font. It seems strange to me that you compel me to make these observations—here, in the presence of the Rector, who surely cannot fail to admit that a baptism, celebrated in a church, in the naked simplicity of its prescribed ritual, has a far greater solemnity about it.

The Rector. Quite so . . . yes, I agree . . .

Baldovino. Furthermore—I am not the only person involved. It is a question of the baby who belongs to the mother, first of all. Suppose we ask her. (*He pushes twice*

on the button in the wall.) However, let us not try to influence her—neither I, nor you two people—let us leave it to the Rector. (*The Maid enters through the door, Right.*) Please ask your mistress if she can step in here a moment. (*The Maid bows and withdraws.*)

The Rector. Why, I should feel more comfortable if you did the talking, Signor Baldovino—you do it so well!

Baldovino. Oh, no! No! On the contrary! I shall keep out of it. You state the case, just as you see it—and I am sure you will reflect my point of view. (*Turning to Maddalena and to Fabio.*) And you two can speak for yourselves. Anyhow, the mother should decide, and we will do as she says. (*Agata appears, in a luxurious dressing-gown, from the door at the Right. She is pale, erect, very much on her dignity. Fabio and The Rector rise. Baldovino is already standing.*)

Agata. Oh—

The Rector. My warmest congratulations, Madame!

Fabio (*bowing*). And mine too, Madame!

Baldovino (*to Agata*). It is this question of baptizing the baby. (*Turning to the Rector.*) And now, you will excuse me, Father.

The Rector (*bowing*). My compliments, Signor Baldovino. (*Baldovino retires through the door, Left.*)

Agata. Hasn't everything been arranged? You wanted me?

Maddalena. Yes, everything is ready in the other room —and it looks splendid too. . . .

Fabio. But something has turned up. . . .

The Rector. It seems Signor Baldovino . . . why . . . er . . .

Maddalena. . . . refuses to have the baptism here, at home!

Agata. Why?

Maddalena. Because, he says . . .

The Rector. One moment, if you please, Signora. Really, Signor Baldovino did not refuse, exactly. He asks you to decide, Signora—because, he says, the child belongs first of all to you—to its mother. So that, if you decide to have the baptism here—

Maddalena. . . . just as we had planned, you know . . .

The Rector. . . . for my part, I see no particular harm in it.

Fabio. Some of our best people do it this way, all the time! . . .

The Rector. . . . as I pointed out—remember—as I pointed out to Signor Baldovino . . .

Agata. Well? What have I got to decide, then?

The Rector. Why, it's this way: Signor Baldovino has remarked—and quite properly, as we must recognize—quite properly—with a sense of respect for the Church which does him the highest honor . . . he has remarked that the baptismal ceremony certainly has a greater solemnity when celebrated in the church edifice—in the sanctum assigned to it. And that, in order to offer no offence—or rather—no—he said it better than that, didn't he?—"Without claiming any special privilege," he said—which might cast reproach on this rite which we are celebrating in the name of the child . . . a mere matter of principle, you understand—a mere matter of principle!

Agata. Well, in that case, if you think so too—

The Rector. Oh, as for the principle, Signora—certainly I approve of the principle!

Agata. Very well, then! Let's have it in the church!

Maddalena. What? Do you insist on that point too?

Agata. Why, I want everything as it should be, Mamma.

The Rector. In principle, as I was saying, Signora—I approve. But, after all . . .

Fabio. There is no harm in having it here.

The Rector. Certainly not! What harm could there possibly be?

Fabio. He is doing it just to spoil everything!

The Rector. But the young lady wants it in the church, then?

Agata. Yes, Father—I prefer to have it in the church.

The Rector. Very well, then! The church is not far away—you will find me always at your disposal. So I wish you good morning, Madame (*to Maddalena*) . . . and to you, Madame . . . (*to Agata*).

Maddalena. This is the way, Father—

The Rector. Ah, yes, thank you! But don't bother—don't bother!—Good afternoon, Marquis!

Fabio. My compliments, Father!

The Rector (*to Maddalena*). Oh, please don't bother—don't bother, Signora!

Maddalena. No, no! I'll go with you! Please! . . . please! . . . (*The Rector and Maddalena go out through the door, Rear. Agata, pale, nervous, frightened, starts for the door, Left. Fabio, unable to control himself, steps up to her, and addresses her vehemently.*)

Fabio. Agata! In the name of God! You are driving me to distraction!

Agata. Hush! (*Nods significantly toward the door, Left.*) Remember, Fabio!

Fabio. Again you are doing what he orders?

Agata. Again—if what he orders is the proper thing to do!

Fabio. Since that man first put his foot inside this house, you have done absolutely everything he says!

Agata. Oh, let's not bring up all that! We accepted his terms, didn't we?

Fabio. Yes—but that's not the thing! I can see that you are doing it yourself, now! Yourself—do you hear? We agreed—yes! But that was to help you over the shock of your first meeting—to help you overcome the horror you might feel. We thought you might get over that by listening to what he said, without seeing him. But now, here you are—you calmly accept everything that we agreed on then, and which I agreed on only for your sake! But now it's you—it's you, Agata! Because he knows . . .

Agata (*on her dignity*). What does he know?

Fabio. You see? You see? You are anxious for him to know that there has been nothing between us since that time! You are considering *him!*

Agata. I am considering myself!

Fabio. No—him!—him!

Agata. No! It's for my own sake—it's for my own sake! I can't allow him to suspect anything else!

Fabio. No! It's because you want him to respect you! You want his approval! You want his commendation! As though he had not come in here on our terms—lending himself, in other words, to our idea!

Agata. What does that mean, except that his shame is also ours? You want all the shame to belong to him! I don't want it for myself—that's all!

Fabio. But I want what belongs to me—what should still be mine! You! You! You! (*He throws his arms frantically about her, and tries to clasp her to him, Agata struggling to throw him off.*)

Agata. No! No! Let me alone! Don't! Don't! I told you—not unless . . .

Fabio (*persisting, with increasing violence*). But he will

go away today—today! I will drive him out of the house like a thief—today—today!

Agata (*in astonishment, and ceasing her resistance*). A thief?

Fabio (*pressing her to him*). Yes—yes—like a thief! Like a thief! He has fallen into our trap—he has stolen money!

Agata. Are you sure?

Fabio. I am sure! He has three hundred thousand lire of ours in his pocket. We will drive him out of the house today! And you will belong to me again—you will be mine! —mine!—mine! (*The door on the Left opens, and Baldovino steps forward, in a Derby hat. Fabio stands there, with Agata in his arms. Baldovino stops, in surprise.*)

Baldovino. Oh—I beg your pardon! (*Then, with severity, softened by a smile of keen shrewdness.*) But, I say—It was I who found you! And so it's of no importance! But, just imagine—it might just as well have been the butler! You might at least lock the doors, don't you think?

Agata (*angrily*). There is no need of locking any doors!

Baldovino. I was not thinking of myself, Signora. I meant my remark for the Marquis—and on your account!

Agata. I was saying the same thing to the Marquis, who now, for that matter . . . (*She looks at Baldovino haughtily.*) He has something to say to you, I believe.

Baldovino. To me? Oh, I am quite at his disposal. And about what, may I ask?

Agata (*surveying him haughtily*). You might ask yourself that question!

Baldovino. Myself? (*He turns to Fabio.*) What's up, sir?

Agata (*sharply, to Fabio*). Tell him what you told me!

Fabio. No—not now!

Agata. Now! You must tell him, now! Right here —in front of me!

Fabio. But we ought to wait! . . .

Baldovino (*sarcastically*). Perhaps the Marquis would rather have a witness present!

Fabio. I don't need any witnesses! . . . You have three hundred thousand lire in your pocket!

Baldovino (*calmly, smiling*). No, Marquis—I have more than that in my pocket! I have five hundred and sixty-three thousand lire in my pocket! Wait a moment (*from his inside pocket he takes a purse and draws out five packages of stock, duly certified. He counts the paper over, and then reads aloud*).—five hundred and sixty-three thousand, seven hundred and twenty-eight lire and sixty centimes! More than half a million, sir! I tell you, Marquis, you are underestimating me!

Fabio. I don't care what the figure is—it makes no difference to me! You can keep it all, and clear out!

Baldovino. You are in too much of a hurry—too much of a hurry, Signor Marchese. Perhaps you have reasons to be in such a hurry, for all I know! But, on that account precisely—please observe that the situation is much more serious than you imagine!

Fabio. If you please—don't put on quite so many airs!

Baldovino. Airs? Not at all! (*He turns to Agata.*) I wonder, Madame, if you would be so good as to come over here and see. (*Agata steps, frowning and stern, in his direction. Baldovino resumes.*) If you are anxious to make me out a thief, that is a proposition which I am ready to discuss—in fact, it might be better to discuss it right now. But I must ask you to observe, first of all, that it is not fair toward me. Notice, here! (*He shows the stocks, which he spreads out like a fan.*) As you see, Signor Marchese, these bonds are made out as savings—as unexpected earnings of your

corporation—five hundred thousand lire, or more. But this makes no difference. We are still in time to change, Signora. I might have pocketed the whole sum of money, as they intended (*with a nod in Fabio's direction, but alluding also to the associates of the Marquis*), if I had fallen into the trap set for me by that squatty little individual they have been throwing in my way—a certain Signor Marchetto Fongi, who came in this morning also . . . Oh (*to Fabio*), I agree —you planned it fairly well: the trap was well laid! (*To Agata.*) Probably you don't understand such things, Signora. They fixed it this way: my accounts were to show a certain large sum of money, which I would not have to account for, and which I could have put into my own pocket, in absolute certainty that no one would ever have noticed. No one would have noticed, I say—except the people who had put the money in the safe—because if I had taken the bait—if I had put the money into my own pocket, they would have collared me at once with the booty on my person. (*To Fabio.*) That was your game, wasn't it?

Agata (*horrified, and looking sternly at Fabio*). Is that true?

Baldovino (*speaking up*). Oh, please, Signora—don't take it that way! If you can ask him such a question with that severity—notice that not he, but I, will be the most hurt . . . because what does the whole thing mean? It means that really the condition this man is in must be something frightful, intolerable—and if it becomes intolerable for him, inevitably it must become intolerable for me!

Agata. Why? For you?

Baldovino (*giving her a rapid but intense glance, then suddenly lowering his eyes, and looking away in great emotion*). Why, because if I become a man and not just a formality toward you—why, I — I couldn't — Signora — the saddest thing imaginable would happen to me . . . why . . .

I couldn't look people in the eye again! (*He passes a hand over his forehead, in great emotion.*) But, no! See here. We must settle this right away . . . (*Bitterly.*) I was thinking today of the fun I was going to have at the Directors' meeting with this Marchetto Fongi—and even with you, Signor Marchese, who thought you could catch me—really, a man like me—in a trap like that! But now, I suddenly realise—if you could bring yourselves to such a trick—if you could bring yourselves to make me out a thief, just to gain an advantage with her—(*he points to Agata*) and without considering that the public disgrace that would fall upon me, as a thief, must necessarily revert upon this newborn child—well—I suddenly realize that the pleasure of honesty must be a different one for me—different, that is, from the one I had been intending. (*He hands the bonds to Fabio.*) Please take these, Signor Marchese.

Fabio. What do I want them for?

Baldovino. Why, you can tear them up! They are all I have to clear myself. The money is in the safe, down to the last penny! (*He looks Fabio in the eye. Then, harshly and contemptuously.*) But you must steal the money yourself!

Fabio (*turning, as though someone had slapped him in the face.*) I?

Baldovino. Yes—you! You! You!

Fabio. Are you crazy?

Baldovino (*continuing to eye him contemptuously, and with vehemence*). Why go half way, Signor Marchese? I pointed out to you in the very beginning that the moment you wanted me to be honest, you would inevitably come to this point—that the dirty work you would have to do yourself! So you steal the money, and I will pass for the thief! And then—I will go away—because, after all, I can't stay here any longer!

Fabio. But you are crazy!

Baldovino. Crazy? Not at all! I am doing the thinking for you, and all the others. Oh, I'm not saying that you ought to have me put in jail—you couldn't do that, anyway. You will steal the money—but only so far as I am concerned!

Fabio (*in the most intense excitement, and advancing upon him*). What do you mean by suggesting such a thing?

Baldovino. Oh, no offence—no offence! Just my way of saying things, Signor Marchese. Oh, no—you are going to play a very grand game—you will just take the money out of the safe, to show that I have stolen it! But then you will make the loss good to the firm out of your own pocket! So that your associates will lose nothing from having trusted me on a recommendation from you! That's clear, isn't it? But I will still look like the thief, you see!

Agata (*protesting*). No! No! I will not allow that! (*The two men stand facing each other. Then, to correct, but without destroying, the effect of her protest, she adds.*) And how about my baby, Signor Baldovino?

Baldovino. But it is sheer necessity, Signora!

Agata. No! I cannot allow such a thing! I refuse to allow it!

The Butler (*appearing at the door, Right, Rear, and announcing*). The Directors, and Mr. Fongi! (*He retires.*)

Fabio (*in utter consternation*). Let us postpone this matter until tomorrow!

Baldovino (*assertive, strong, challenging*). I have made up my mind, and I am ready now!

Agata. But, I tell you—I refuse! I refuse! You understand?

Baldovino (*with stern resolution*). All the more, because of that, Signora!

Marchetto Fongi (*entering, with the four Directors*). May we come in? May we come in?

(*At the door, on the Right, appear Signora Maddalena with her hat and coat on, and a nurse in gala attire, trundling the child in a magnificent baby-carriage covered with a blue veil. The people all crowd around the nurse. Congratulations, exclamations, compliments appropriate to the occasion. Maddalena cautiously lifts the veil to show the baby to its admirers.*)

Curtain

ACT III

(*Baldovino's study. Door, Rear; a lateral door, Right. Furnishings quiet, but sumptuous. Baldovino appears in the same suit of clothes he wore in the first act. He is sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, looking frowningly at the floor. Maddalena is talking to him urgently.*)

MADDALENA. But you ought to understand that you have no right to do so! It is no longer a question either of you or of him or of Agata—but of the child, of the child!

BALDOVINO (*looking up fiercely*). What should I care about the child?

MADDALENA (*startled, but recovering herself*). Ah, yes —that's true! But I must remind you of what you yourself said about the baby, and the wrong that would be done him —noble words, besides!—they reached my daughter's heart! —and which now, as you must understand, pain her terribly —now that she is nothing but a mother—a mother, only!

BALDOVINO. I have ceased to understand anything in this whole matter, Signora!

MADDALENA. But that cannot be true! You made the observation to him yesterday yourself!

BALDOVINO. What observation?

MADDALENA. That he ought not to do it for the child's sake!

BALDOVINO. I? Not at all, Signora! I don't care so much because he went and did it! I knew very well he would! (*He looks up at her with weariness rather than contempt.*) And you knew he would yourself, Signora!

Maddalena. Oh, no—I didn't! I assure you, I didn't!

Baldovino. You didn't? Well, tell me—why did he ever start this corporation, if it wasn't for that purpose?

Maddalena. Why . . . I suppose—to give you something to do.

Baldovino. Yes—and to keep me away from home—of course! Just for that—at the beginning! Because he hoped that with greater freedom here—because I would be busy elsewhere—your daughter . . .

Maddalena. No! Don't say that! Agata—no! He . . . yes—that was his motive! But I can assure you that Agata—

Baldovino (*throwing up his arms impatiently*). Oh, I say! Are you as innocent as all that? You dare give me that assurance—you—to me?

Maddalena. It's the truth!

Baldovino. And doesn't it terrify you? (*A pause.*) Don't you understand that this means that I must go away? And that you, instead of coming here to me, should be with your daughter, trying to persuade her that it is best that I should go away?

Maddalena. But how, please—how? That's the question!

Baldovino. It doesn't matter how. It matters only that I go away.

Maddalena. No, no! She won't let you!

Baldovino. Oh, please, Signora! Don't drive me crazy too! Don't make me lose the strength of mind I still have, to see the consequences of the things that other people are doing blindly—blindly, notice—not because they are fools—but because when a person is alive, he lives, and does not see! I see, because I entered this house in order to escape from living. You want to bring me back to life perforce! Look out! Look out! Because if life once gets its grip

on me, I will lose my ability to see things too! (*He stops. With difficulty overcoming his feelings, the suppression of which gives his features an expression of ferocity, he resumes calmly, almost coldly.*) Look! I, quite simply, tried to warn the Marquis of the consequences of what he has done, namely, that in trying to put an honest man in the position of a thief—notice, now—it is not I exactly who am honest, you understand—but rather the man who he insisted must be honest—the man whose part I consented to play in this house, to show him that he did not really understand . . . in trying to pass this man off for a thief, it was absolutely necessary that he should steal the money!

Maddalena. But how can you expect him to steal it!

Baldovino. He must—to make me look like a thief!

Maddalena. But he cannot—he must not!

Baldovino. He will steal it—he will steal it, I assure you! That is to say, he will pretend to steal it. If he doesn't, I will steal it myself—so there! Do you want to oblige me to steal the money? Do you want to force me to steal the money? (*Maurizio enters from the door, Rear. Baldovino, catching sight of him, bursts into a loud laugh.*) Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha! So you are coming now—eh? It's your turn to beg me not to do such a stupid thing!

Maddalena (*urgently, to Maurizio*). Yes, yes—please—my dear Setti! You try to persuade him!

Maurizio. Oh, don't worry—he won't! Because he knows it would be a crazy thing to do—not on his part, but on Fabio's!

Baldovino. So I suppose he sent you, eh?—to avert the disaster!

Maurizio. Not at all! I am here because you asked me to come yourself!

Baldovino. Yes, to be sure! And have you brought me the hundred lire I asked you to lend me?

Maurizio. I haven't brought a cent!

Baldovino. Because you understood—an intelligent man like you—that it was all a bluff! Fine! Fine! (*He takes his own coat by the two lapels.*) You see, however, here I am—with money, clothes on—ready to go away—just as I said in my letter. The same suit in which I came here! But an honest man, dressed this way—eh?—needs only a hundred lire to get away decently. So he tries to borrow them of a friend—the schoolmate of his youth! (*Running up to Maurizio suddenly, and seizing him by his two arms.*) But—notice! I am very particular about keeping up this pretence!

Maurizio (*dumbfounded*). What the devil are you talking about?

Baldovino (*looking at Signora Maddalena and laughing again*). It's this way, Signora! I'll explain. You see, the mistake—the Marquis's mistake, Signora—oh, a very excusable mistake, and worthy of the greatest tolerance on my part—consisted simply in believing that I could fall into a trap. Well, now—that mistake can be corrected. The Marquis can be convinced that, since I came into this house to play a game which it amused me to play, we must play the game to the very end—to the point of stealing money. Yes, Signora—not really stealing, of course you understand—just to the point where I, in other words, put into my pocket the three hundred thousand lire, as he thought I would! (There are really more than five hundred thousand, Signora!) Well—I will do it—and I'll do it for nothing! I will even play stealing all that money—just to pay for the pleasure I have had in the game! Now, don't be afraid—don't you worry about the threat I hinted at, just to keep the Marquis in his place. Don't you be afraid I'm going to take the baby away from you, some three or four years hence! Nonsense! What do I want with a baby? Or do you think I am just a blackmailer?

Maurizio. Nonsense, man! No one here is thinking of such a thing!

Baldovino. Ah, yes—but *I* had thought of such a thing!

Maurizio. I tell you to shut up!

Baldovino. At least, I had thought—not of the blackmail—no!—but I had thought of playing the game, even to the point of enjoying this exquisite pleasure—of seeing all you people here on your knees, begging me not to pass myself off for a thief by taking money which you had done your utmost to get me to steal!

Maurizio. But you didn't steal it, did you?

Baldovino. Good for you! But I want to see *him* steal it, with his own hands! (*Noticing Fabio, pale, in great distress, appearing in the doorway at the Right.*) And he will take it, I assure you!

Fabio (*hardly able to stand, and approaching Baldovino in terror*). So I will steal it? But in that case—oh—you left—where did you leave it? Did you give the key to someone else?

Baldovino. No, Signor Marchese. Why?

Fabio. My God! Do you suppose someone else? . . . Fongi—Fongi may have talked!

Maurizio. Is the money gone?

Maddalena. Oh! Oh! Oh!

Baldovino. No, no! Don't worry, Signor Marchese. (*He strikes his hand on the outside of his coat.*) I have it here!

Fabio. Ah! So you took the money!

Baldovino. I told you that I would tolerate no halfway business!

Fabio. But, what in the world are you getting at?

Baldovino. Don't be afraid! I knew that a gentleman like you would find it difficult—in fact, a little beneath him

—to take money out of a safe, even for a moment, and as a joke! So I went and took it myself, last night!

Fabio. You did? And why?

Baldovino. Why? To enable you, Signor Marchese, to make the magnificent gesture of restitution!

Fabio. You are still hammering on that point?

Baldovino. But you see, I have really taken the money —and now, if you don't do as I say—what has so far been a pretence will become the fact that you wanted it to be.

Fabio. Wanted—yes! But you understand that I don't want it any longer, don't you?

Baldovino. Yes—but now *I* want it that way, Signor Marchese.

Fabio. What do you want?

Baldovino. Just what you wanted. Yesterday, in the other room (*he nods toward the door*), you told the young lady that I had the money in my pocket. Well—I *have* it in my pocket!

Fabio. Yes—that may be. But you haven't me in your pocket!

Baldovino. Yes—you in my pocket, too, Signor Marchese. I am now going to the Directors' meeting. I am going to make my report—and you cannot prevent me! I will naturally say nothing about this surplus, which Marchetto Fongi had so carefully arranged for me. And I will give him the satisfaction of catching me stealing. And don't you worry—I'll be able to look the part of a thief caught in the act! And then, later on—we'll settle everything!

Fabio. You will do no such thing!

Baldovino. Yes, I will—yes, I will, Signor Marchese!

Maurizio. But a man can't make himself out a thief just because he wants to, when he is not!

Baldovino (*threateningly*). I told you that I am ready

to go so far as actually to steal the money, if you persist in blocking me!

Fabio. But why, in God's name—why? If I myself ask you to stay here!

Baldovino (*turning on him, frowning, and eyeing him severely, but with shrewd understanding. He speaks very slowly and gravely*). But, Signor Marchese—how am I to stay here, as you suggest?

Fabio. I tell you that I am sorry—sincerely sorry!

Baldovino. For what?

Fabio. For what I have done.

Baldovino. But it isn't for what you have done you must be sorry, my dear sir—it is very natural you should be sorry for that—but for what you have not done!

Fabio. What should I have done?

Baldovino. What? Why, you should have come to me, after a few months, and told me that although I was keeping to the bargain—which, for that matter, cost me nothing—and though you were disposed to keep to it also—and that, too, was natural—there was somebody here—somebody higher than you and me, whom, as I myself predicted, dignity and decency would keep from allowing me to stay here. And I, right away, my dear sir, would have shown you the absurdity of your idea that an honest man might come into this house and play the part you wanted him to play.

Fabio. Yes—yes—you are right! And, in fact, I did protest to this man here (*He points to Maurizio*) for bringing me a man like you—

Baldovino. No—that's not fair. He did very well, I assure you, in bringing a man like me. You wanted an ordinary, honest man, to do a thing like this? How could an ordinary man accept such a position as this, unless he were a downright scoundrel? I was able to accept such a propo-

sition, as you see, because I am in a position even to risk passing for a thief!

Maurizio. Why—how is that?

Fabio (*speaking at the same time*). Just for the fun of the thing?

Maurizio. Who is forcing you to be a thief? Nobody wants you to be!

Maddalena. Nobody! In fact, we are all asking you not to!

Baldovino. Yes—you are all asking me—(*To Maurizio*) you, out of friendship (*To Signora Maddalena*) you, for the sake of the child (*To Fabio*) and you—why?

Fabio. For the same reason!

Baldovino (*looking him in the eye*). And for what other reason? (*Fabio does not answer.*) But I will tell you for what other reason. Because now you have seen the effects of what you did. (*To Maddalena.*) My dear Signora, the good name of this child? Nonsense! *He* knows (*he nods towards Maurizio*) that unfortunately, my past—yes, it was possible, of course, that this present life of mine, looked at in connection with the birth of this child, might have caused people to forget certain unpleasant things about my dark past. But you have something else than the child to think about, my dear Signora. (*Turning to the others also now.*) You people seem to forget all about *me!* You are thinking that I am here just for you people. But after all, I am a person of flesh and bone myself! I have blood in my veins—a black, thick blood, embittered with all the poison of painful memories, and I am afraid! I am afraid! Yesterday, in there, in the other room, when this gentleman (*he nods toward Fabio*) accused me, there in the presence of your daughter, of being a thief—I fell more blindly than he—more blindly than all of you—into another and far more subtle trap—which for ten months past, here in this

house, in the neighborhood of that woman whom I scarcely dared to look at—has been constantly lying about to catch me! And this stupid little trick of yours, Signor Marchese, was just enough to make me conscious of the danger! Now, I—I should have been silent, you understand! I should have swallowed your insult in her presence—allowed myself to be called a thief, there in her presence; then take you off alone by myself, and prove to you that it wasn't true; and force you secretly to play the game with me, to the end. But you see—I could not control myself—the man in me rebelled! And now you, and this lady here—and you, Maurizio—you are rash enough to want to keep me still. That is why I tell you that to smother this man that has come to life in me again, I am now forced to steal the money, and become a real thief! (*They stand there looking at him, not knowing what to say. A pause. The door opens on the Right. Agata appears—pale, determined. She steps forward a few paces, and stops. Baldovino looks at her; his face, grave, earnest, shows his effort to master his emotions, but an abject terror can be seen in his eyes.*)

Agata (*to her mother, Fabio and Maurizio*). I want to speak with Signor Baldovino alone.

Baldovino (*stammering, his eyes to the floor*). No, Signora—no! Look! I—

Agata. I have something to say to you!

Baldovino (*stammering, his eyes to the floor*). Er—it is—er—it is quite useless, Signora. I have said to these people—to these people—all I have to say!

Agata. Then they may also hear what I have to say to you.

Baldovino. No—no—please! Please! Don't! I assure you—it is useless! Don't! Don't!

Agata. I will! (*To the others.*) I ask you, please—leave us alone! (*Maddalena, Fabio, and Maurizio with-*

draw through the door, Right.) I have not come to ask you not to go away. I have come to tell you that I am going with you!

Baldovino (*staggering—barely able to keep his feet. He answers in a low voice*). I understand. You don't bring up the question of the baby—no! A woman like you does not ask for sacrifices. She makes them!

Agata. But it is not a sacrifice at all—it is merely what I must do!

Baldovino. No, Signora, no! You must do no such thing, either for me or for yourself. And it is my duty to prevent you, at whatever cost!

Agata. You cannot. I am your wife! You are going away? I agree. You ought to go away. So—I am going with you!

Baldovino. Going with me, where? But, please—what are you saying? Have pity on yourself, and on me—don't ask me to speak! Understand for yourself, because I—because I—in your presence—somehow, I cannot speak!

Agata. But there is no need of speaking! I was satisfied with what you said the very first day! I should have gone to you at once, and offered you my hand!

Baldovino. Ah—if you had, Signora—I swear to you that I hoped—I hoped for a moment—I hoped that you would! Not that I could have taken your hand—but it would all have been over then!

Agata. You would have backed out?

Baldovino. No—but I would have been humbled before you, Signora—as I am humbled now!

Agata. And why? For having spoken honestly?

Baldovino. Nothing easier, Signora—nothing easier than honesty, so long as it is a question of saving appearances, you understand. If you had come to me, and told me that the deception was no longer possible for you, I could

not have stayed in this house a single moment—as I cannot now!

Agata. So, then, you thought . . .

Baldovino. No, Signora—I waited. I did not see you come to me. I talked just to show him that to ask honesty of me was impossible—impossible, not for me, but for all of you. So now, you must understand that, with the conditions changed, as you have changed them, it becomes impossible even for me—not because the desire, the will, is lacking—but because of what I am, Signora—because of all that I have done. Of course, this game that I was playing here all by itself . . .

Agata. But we asked you to play that game!

Baldovino. And I consented to play it!

Agata. Yes—but in pointing out beforehand all the consequences, so as to dissuade him from accepting it. Well—I accepted it, too!

Baldovino. And you shouldn't have accepted — you shouldn't have, Signora—because—and herein lay your mistake—it was not I who was really talking, but rather the absurd mask that I was wearing. And why? Here you were—all three of you—a portion of this poor humanity of ours, writhing in the joys, and exulting in the torments, of the life that humanity leads. Here was a poor weak mother, who had nevertheless brought herself to the supreme sacrifice of consenting that her daughter should love outside the law. And you, blinded by your love for a thoroughly decent man, had been able to forget, for a moment, that this man was, unfortunately, the husband of another woman. You thought these were crimes, didn't you! So you tried to evade their consequences—and you called me here! And I came! And I began using toward you a language that bewildered, smothered you, as it were—the language of a fictitious and unnatural honesty, which you had the courage to rebel

against. I knew very well that, in the long run, those two people would not be able to accept the consequences. Their humanity was bound to rebel also. And I heard all the groans of your mother and the Marquis. And I took a keen pleasure, believe me, in watching them build up this intrigue against the most serious of the consequences which I had predicted. But the real danger was for you, Signora. The real danger was that you would accept the consequences to the bitter end. And you have accepted these consequences to the bitter end—because you were in a position to accept them—because in you, unfortunately, the moment you became a mother, the lover died! Now, you are nothing but a mother—and I am not the father of your child! You understand, of course, what that means?

Agata. Ah—I see! It is on account of the child—because he is not yours!

Baldovino. No—no—no! Oh, please—please understand me! Because of the very fact that you would now be willing to come with me, you make the child your own—yours—only yours! And, on that account, in my eyes, the child becomes more sacred than he would be if he were really mine—the pledge of your esteem—the testimonial of your sacrifice!

Agata. Well, then?

Baldovino. I said what I said, just to bring you back to what I really am, Signora. Because you can see nothing but your child. You are still speaking to that mask of a father which I once was!

Agata. I am speaking to you—a man!

Baldovino. But what do you know about me? Who am I?

Agata. Just what you are—the man I see before me! (*Baldovino cringes, as though under an overwhelming blow.*) You can raise your eyes to me, if I am able to look at you;

because, here in your presence, all of us ought to lower our eyes, if for nothing else because you are ashamed of the wrong you may have done!

Baldovino. But I—how could I ever think such things would ever be said to me? (*Suddenly rousing himself as from under a spell, and violently.*) No—no, Signora! Please! Believe me, I am not worthy—do you know what I have here—here, in my pocket—I have five hundred thousand lire, or more!

Agata. Yes. But you will give them back to him. And we will go away.

Baldovino. No! I won't. I am going to keep every cent! I am not going to give the money back! I am not going to give the money back, Signora!

Agata. Well—in that case, baby and I will go with you, just the same.

Baldovino. Just the same? Just the same? (*He collapses into a chair, unable to control himself, hiding his face in his hands, with a violent burst of sobbing.*)

Agata (*looks at him for a second, then steps to the door on the Right and calls*). Mamma! Mamma! (*Maddalena halts in the doorway, and notices Baldovino in tears. She is dumbfounded.*) Just tell those gentlemen that we have no further need for them here.

Baldovino (*leaping to his feet*). No—wait!—the money! (*He draws a big purse from his inside pocket.*) Not you—I will go! (*He tries to restrain his tears and regain control over himself. He cannot find his handkerchief. Agata hands him hers. He catches the significance of this act, which unites them for the first time in tears. He kisses the handkerchief, and carries it to his eyes, still holding one of her hands. He draws up with a deep sigh, which is the expression of an immense inner joy, and cries.*) I know what I will tell them!—I know what I will tell them!

Curtain

NAKED

(Vestire gl'ignudi)

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

ERSILIA DREI
FRANCO LASPIGA (ensign in the Italian Navy)
GROTTI (Italian Consul at Smyrna)
LUDOVICO NOTA (a novelist)
ALFREDO CANTAVALLE (a newspaper man)
SIGNORIA ONORIA (a landlady)
EMMA (the maid)

The scene is laid in Rome in our own time

NAKED

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

ACT I

The study of Ludovico Nota, a novelist. It is one of two "furnished rooms" rented by the author in the lodging house of Signora Onoria. Odd pieces of antique furniture belonging to the novelist are in strong contrast with the standard second-hand articles supplied by the house mistress. In the back set two bookcases with numerous shelves stand one beside the other. The books have been carefully bound in uniform bindings of imitation parchment, the titles printed in red letters on the backs. On the right, between two windows with cheap curtains, a tall writing desk high enough for a person standing to write on. The shelf connecting the two pairs of legs is loaded with heavy dictionaries. In front of each window a large bird cage on a tall wooden rest. One cage is full of canaries, the other of thrushes and goldfinches. To the left, an old sofa upholstered in a figured damask of a light color, but covered with white lace tidies, probably to disguise the pitiable state of the ancient divan. In front of it a Turkish or Persian rug, faded and much the worse for wear. Easy chairs; wooden chairs with upholstered backs and seats; a stand with various articles. On this wall (to the left, that is) and well toward the front of the stage, is the general entrance. In back, to one side of the bookcase, is a door hidden by a portière, and leading into the novelist's bedroom. In the middle of the room an oval-shaped table with books, magazines, newspapers, vases with flowers, ash

trays, and a statuette or two. The walls to the left and right are overdecorated with paintings, etchings, water colors, charcoal drawings, of scant artistic worth—the gifts of artists whom the novelist knows.

Despite its two windows, the room is rather dark because the walls of adjoining houses cut off the light. The truth is that Signor Nota's apartment is on a narrow alley, branching from a busy, noisy thoroughfare. In fact, during pauses in the action on the stage, sounds from the bustling street outside will reach the stage: the rumbling of a truck; the shouts of a hawker; the exhaust of a motorcycle; the starting of an automobile; the cries of a newsboy; the laughter of young people.

As the curtain rises the stage is empty. Through the two windows, which are open, come the noises from the street. The door to the left (the general entrance) opens and Ersilia Drei *appears.*

Twenty-four or twenty-five years old, she is a beautiful girl, but her face is pale and her eyes are sunken deep in their sockets. (Why not? She has just been recalled from the very brink of the grave!). Her dress is plain, black, neat but threadbare—such as a school-teacher or a governess, in poor circumstances, might wear. Her hat is in keeping with the rest of her costume.

Advancing a step or two from the doorway, she stops in hesitation, as though not quite sure of herself, and looks about the room. She does not take a chair, but remains standing, apparently waiting for someone who is still to come. Her eyes survey the furnishings, and she smiles, faintly, at the confusion she sees.

A burst of noise from the busy street. She frowns thoughtfully.

Through the general entrance at last comes Ludovico Nota, *returning his purse to the inside pocket of his coat*

as he passes through the door. He is almost bald on the top of his head. What hair he has is prematurely gray. Inclined to stoutness, he has a clean shaven, florid, ruddy face with lively blue eyes. His white moustache is soiled from cigarette smoke. Around his lips, still fresh and sensuous, an almost youthful smile plays. Cold, intellectual, without any of the qualities which inspire sympathy and confidence out of hand, and at the same time unable to affect an emotionality he does not feel, Nota makes an effort to seem affable, jovial, at least; but this amiability, never quite spontaneous, fails to put people at their ease, and at times is actually embarrassing not to say disconcerting.

Ludovico. Ah, here we are! Have a chair! Make yourself comfortable! My! My! The windows are open! What a noise! The plague of my life! But if I don't keep them open it gets so close in here, you know! (*Takes out a cigarette and starts to light it.*) Do you object, Signorina? (*He walks nervously about the room, uneasy in tone and gesture.*) But do take off your hat! Make yourself quite at home! (*Ersilia removes her hat.*) Awfully close! I don't know . . . perhaps on account of that sofa . . . those chairs . . . a lot of old junk, corpses from my past, you might say. Or perhaps because the landlady insists on washing the floor with water every morning—and she always leaves it damp. Anyhow, stuffy . . . smelly, awfully close! Well, old houses like these! (*Through the door, Rear, enters* Signora Onoria, *a broom in one hand, and, under the other arm, a roll of sheets and pillow cases which she is about to send to the wash. Signora Onoria is about forty years old, short, stout, talkative, her hair dyed, a trace of rouge on her cheeks.*

Onoria. Will you excuse me?

Ludovico (*embarrassed by her sudden appearance*). Oh, you were in the other room?

Onoria (*spitefully*). I have put fresh sheets on your bed, as you asked me to do in the note you left on the hall table this morning.

Ludovico. Oh, yes!

Onoria (*turning and surveying Ersilia from head to foot*). But of course if it's for . . . (*She breaks off.*) Look, Signor Nota, we two had better understand each other clearly. I'll just go and leave these things downstairs . . .

Ludovico (*in some embarrassment and smiling in an effort to conceal it*). Yes, I would get rid of them, if I were you! Dirty clothes!

Onoria. (*turning on him angrily*). Oh, you would, would you? And dirty, eh?

Ludovico. Oh, just an impression I had! I thought you were of the same opinion. I was merely agreeing with you.

Onoria. Yes, but there are other things I should like to be rid of!

Ludovico. That's interesting! What, for instance?

Onoria. Why, here I find you bringing a young lady into the house! You think that's as clean as it might be?

Ludovico. That's a bit too much! You will please speak with respect of my guests or! . . .

Onoria. Or what? I am speaking my mind and I intend to tell you just what I think! I'll leave these things downstairs and then I'll be back! (*She flutters away through the general entrance.*)

Ludovico (*mastering an impulse to follow her*). Silly old gossip!

Ersilia (*trying to restrain him*). Oh no, please let me go away!

Ludovico. Nothing of the kind! I pay the rent for these rooms! This is my house and I'll have anyone I want here! You just sit down!

Onoria (*sweeping back through the door pugnaciously*). Signor Nota, I have rented you a study and a bedroom in my house, but I must remind you that this is the house of a respectable lady!

Ludovico. A lady? You? Your actions show it!

Onoria. A lady! Exactly! I refuse to permit you to keep a girl in these rooms!

Ludovico. I consider what you say insulting in the extreme! You're a boardinghouse-keeper! You're not a lady!

Onoria. You ought to be ashamed, a man your age! And be careful what language you use toward me!

Ludovico. You are not a real lady! You have no tact! You don't seem able to distinguish one sort of person from another!

Ersilia. I've been ill! I'm just out of the hospital!

Ludovico. Don't bother to explain anything to this woman!

Onoria. Oh, if you're sick . . . (*The windows rattle, a truck crashes along the street.*)

Ludovico. So we'll drop the subject, eh? You can't prevent me from lending my quarters for a few days!

Onoria. Yes, I can! Yes, I can! These are my rooms! I choose the people to whom I rent them!

Ludovico. But if one of my sisters . . . a cousin . . . an aunt of mine comes to town . . .

Onoria. They can find plenty of hotels!

Ludovico. Oh, really? And I can't put them up for a night or two here?

Onoria. But this girl . . . is she your sister or your cousin or your aunt? Do you see anything green in my eyes?

Ludovico. But what do you care? What business is it of yours? Supposing I'm the one who goes to the hotel?

Onoria. In that case you ought to ask me in advance,

politely, as a gentleman should, whether I am willing to entertain a young lady!

Ludovico. Ask you to invite her, eh?

Onoria. Precisely! And ask me politely, too, because I am a lady—a respectable lady, though misfortunes have compelled me to earn my living by renting rooms, and doing menial service for men like you!

Ludovico. Men like me?

Onoria. Yes, you are always complaining! If I mop the floor every morning, it's to keep the dirt out of the room. And all those birds! What do you think this is, a hen coop? They sing, eh? But that's not all they do! That's not all they do! Sometimes it takes me half a day to clean! So if the house smells . . .

Ludovico. The birds do all that? No, madam! The house itself is dirty! You shut the windows and . . . well . . . can't you smell it yourself? Now I have to work in here, and if I don't keep the windows closed the noise from the street drives me crazy!

Onoria. Crazy? Drives you crazy? I like that! It is not my street that drives you crazy, my dear sir! You were crazy before you ever came here!

Ludovico (*laughing goodnaturedly in spite of himself*). That's a good one!

Onoria. Just as I say! Crazy! Anyhow, if you don't like it, why don't you go away? I wish you would! I wish you would!

Ludovico. Well, I'll move! Right away! Meantime, would you mind going about your business?

Onoria. Are you giving up your rooms?

Ludovico. Yes, in a few days! At the end of the month!

Onoria. Very well! In that case, I have nothing more to say!

Ludovico. Meantime, you were going downstairs!

Onoria. I'm going! I'm going! Don't worry! I have had my say!

Ludovico. What a woman! What a woman! (*Now that the windows are closed the noise comes somewhat more softly from the street.*) I am so sorry, Signorina! Your first minute here . . . and a scene like that!

Ersilia. Oh, that's all right! What troubles me is that it should be on my account! . . .

Ludovico. No, no! I have a set-to with that old witch every day! But I am tied to her! I can't get away! This ramshackle place! All this cheap, vulgar, common stuff! Look at those curtains! But such are the delightful rewards this age of business men gives to the poor fools who take up literature, especially when they are fools as impractical as I am. You perhaps thought . . . well . . . the home of a writer . . . of an artist! . . .

Ersilia. Oh, no! I don't mind for myself; but it's too bad that a man like you, a man so famous . . . (*Another burst of noise from the street.*)

Ludovico. You hear my orchestra? Famous, did you say? You have seen one of my books?

Ersilia. One of them? I have read many of them!

Ludovico. Did you like them?

Ersilia. Oh yes! Very much!

Ludovico. Fame! Reputation! . . . Well . . . you know how it is with us? You know the milkweed, don't you?—those little seeds hung on parachutes, the lightest breeze carrying them all around, here and there? That's the way it is with us! That's the way! Fad . . . fashion gets hold of a writer and spreads his name to the four winds; but finally it lets him down in some dark corner of forgetfulness! Writing is a game! It is something like playing the market where the stocks go up and go down! Yesterday

my name was worth a hundred; today it is way below par, almost approaching zero!

Ersilia. Oh, I don't believe that!

Ludovico. Zero, or virtually zero! But that doesn't bother me! Tomorrow a hundred again, or perhaps a thousand! Let's hope so, eh? I've just put something big across, you know! Two big contracts! One with a newspaper syndicate, and the other with a publisher! There'll be quite an advance, so that at the end of the month we'll go and get a nice little apartment, eh? In one of those new modern buildings on the park! What do you say? Tomorrow we'll go house hunting, together! And we'll go looking for furniture—together! You will do the choosing. You must build your nest with your own hands!

Ersilia. Oh, but all on my account?

Ludovico. No! No! No! I had to get out anyhow! Couldn't stand it any longer here! Impossible! They say a writer is a sedentary person, but look at my desk! I do all my writing on my feet! I refuse to have anything to do with tradition! However, I can see the necessity of having a house of my own at last . . . even if it's just a little three-room apartment! But with my own things! Oh, perhaps I won't live there myself! You see I'm like . . . well . . . I'm a person who is always beginning over again! But you can't imagine how happy I am that I had that inspiration—the idea of writing to you—of beginning over again, this time, with you, sharing with you this little stroke of good luck that has come to me! A mud-hole . . . flies . . . mosquitos . . . the stench of stagnant water; and then suddenly—oof! What has happened? Nothing! A breath of air! The wind has risen! That's the way I am! And we'll buy everything brand new, eh? Even . . . yes, eh?—a set of dishes . . . things for the kitchen! Ha ha ha! How funny it is! Things for the kitchen! Who could imagine

I would ever own a frying pan, an iron kettle, a dish rag! Ha ha ha! But it's great, isn't it? A house of my own, and a woman to look after it . . . a beautiful little creature like you! Oh, you'll see . . . you'll see!

Ersilia. Yes, I can take care of an apartment! I am a good housekeeper! How can I ever thank you? How can I ever thank you?

Ludovico. I can do without the thanks! Or rather I'm sure I should thank you for having accepted the little that I . . .

Ersilia. Oh, it is not a little—don't say that! It is so much . . . so much . . . for me!

Ludovico. It will be much, perhaps, in the end, because of what you make it; but now it's very very little!

Ersilia. Don't say that! Of the ten offers or more that came to me while I was in the hospital . . .

Ludovico (*in surprise*). Ten or more? Offers from whom?

Ersilia. From various people! I have them in my hand-bag, here! All their names and addresses, and some of them well-known names!

Ludovico. Well! Well! Who for example? Let me look at them!

Ersilia. No! Perhaps later on . . . or wouldn't it be better to tear them up? You see, of them all I chose yours!

Ludovico (*taking her hand and kissing it*). Thank you! (*Then bringing himself to order again.*) And yet . . . ah . . . well, I wonder! Ah, you little rogue! I can see it in your eyes!

Ersilia. What?

Ludovico. Something not very complimentary to me! See if I haven't guessed it: of the ten offers you received—honest now!—you chose mine because I said in my letter "if

you would deign to accept, Signorina, the companionship of an old writer" . . .

Ersilia. But there was no signature except your first name: "Faust."

Ludovico. Worse luck! In that case, I can see it was the word 'old' that got you, and not the name! But you might have thought that an old man who signed himself "Faust" could easily prove dangerous!

Ersilia. Dangerous? Why?

Ludovico. Why, an old man named "Faust" might sell his soul to the Devil, for instance, to get back his youth again!

Ersilia. Oh, if you only knew—I am so mortified!

Ludovico. Mortified? Why?

Ersilia. Because of this great good fortune!

Ludovico. Why good fortune? Because I'm a writer—as you say, a famous writer?

Ersilia. Because the story of my troubles printed in the papers—the story of the desperate attempt I made—was able to win the attention, the respect, the pity! . . .

Ludovico. Why don't you say selfishness . . . was able to stir the selfish interest? . . .

Ersilia. . . . of a man like . . . like you!

Ludovico. Well, you see . . . fact is . . . I felt—how shall I say it—I felt all stirred up, there! . . . all stirred up; when I read your story in the papers! It was something like . . . well, you know . . . we novelists . . . well, sometimes a fact, a situation comes to our attention, quite casually, and we experience inside us—oh, I don't know—a shock, let us call it—a sudden wave of sympathy that sweeps over us, the conviction in short, that we have found, without effort on our part, without our trying to find it, the nucleus, the starting point, the germ, of a story, of a novel . . .

Ersilia. So you thought that . . . I mean to say . . . you thought you could put me into a book?

Ludovico. No! Please don't misunderstand! Please don't imagine I have been trying to use you as mere material for my writing! I drew the parallel to make you see more clearly how I felt, how your case caught me, took possession of me all over!

Ersilia. But I shouldn't mind even if it were that!

Ludovico. Please believe what I say!

Ersilia. I do! But if my poor life, all my sorrows and misfortunes, can serve at least for such a purpose! . . .

Ludovico. For one of my books?

Ersilia. Why not? I would be happy, proud, oh so proud, really!

Ludovico. I throw up my hands!

Ersilia. Why?

Ludovico. Because you again remind me that I am an old, old man!

Ersilia. I do? Why? I don't mean that! I mean . . .

Ludovico. A novel, my dear child, can be written, but it can also be lived! I said that I felt you taking entire possession of me; but it wasn't to write a novel—it was to live one! I hold out my arms to you—but you, instead of offering me—what shall I say—your lips for instance—hand me pen and paper to write your story!

Ersilia (*embarrassed, bowing her head*). But we hardly know each other! It is too soon!

Ludovico. Too soon for your lips, I grant you that; but—later on perhaps?

Ersilia (*sorrowfully*). No!

Ludovico. Just notice how differently you and I are feeling toward the present situation. I was hurt a little because you might have thought my interest in your case merely the curiosity of a writer; and you on the other hand

are hurt (or at least you are not very much pleased), if I tell you that the writer, as a writer pure and simple—clever I mean to say, and not just old—did not need to make you any such offer as I have made, nor to go and get you at the very door of the hospital; because the novel . . . well . . . as I read about you in the papers . . . the novel came into my head full-grown—the plot, the characters, the episodes, everything!

Ersilia. Really? All of a sudden? Just like that?

Ludivico. All of a sudden! It just flashed through my mind! I could see it almost paragraph by paragraph, with all its wealth of situation and detail! Oh, magnificent! The East . . . the Levant . . . a villa on the seashore . . . a house with a flat roof! You there, a governess! And the baby falls from the roof, and you are sent away. Then a ship at sea! Then here you are home again, and you discover how terrible . . . oh I could see it all . . . the whole thing—even before I knew what you looked like, before I was acquainted with you at all!

Ersilia. In your imagination, that is! (*Piqued with curiosity.*) So you imagined me? How did you think of me? What was I like? This way? As I really am?

Ludovico. No! (*With a negative gesture, and smiling.*)

Ersilia (*insisting*). How did you think of me? Please tell me!

Ludovico. Why are you so anxious to find out?

Ersilia. Because I should like to be just as you thought of me!

Ludovico. Oh no! Because I like you very much as you are! In fact, I like you better this way—for myself, that is—not for the novel, necessarily!

Ersilia. But in that case, the novel that was mine, my story, you made it up around another woman!

Ludovico. Of course! Of course! Around the woman I had imagined!

Ersilia. Was she very different from me?

Ludovico. She was another woman!

Ersilia. Oh dear, dear! In that case . . . well . . . I don't understand . . . I don't understand!

Ludovico. What don't you understand?

Ersilia. Why you are interested in me! Why me?

Ludovico. Whom should I be interested in if not in you?

Ersilia. But I am not the woman in your story! If my experience, my misfortunes, everything in short that interested you when you read about it in the papers . . . I mean . . . if it interested you not on my account, but in connection with another woman who is not like me . . . (*She breaks off in bewilderment.*)

Ludovico. What were you going to say, little girl?

Ersilia. . . . then I can go away!

Ludovico (*catching her, and resting an arm delicately around her waist*). But not at all, not at all, my dear child! The idea! We'll let the woman in the novel go away! But she isn't you, she isn't you!

Ersilia (*hurt, suspicious*). She and I are different people? (*Almost in terror.*) You don't believe then . . .

Ludovico (*smiling*). Of course I believe! Of course! But I should prefer not to think of you any longer in connection with the novel which may have been yours, to be sure . . . which is yours, in fact . . . yes! However, I don't think of you in that connection any longer; because, you understand, as I thought of you for my book you were different; you were another person! Now I should like to think of you in your new life, such as it is to be, as it is going to be from now on, that is, with me! And I hope that you, too, will think of yourself only in this new life,

forgetting all about the terrible things that have happened to you!

Ersilia (*with infinite sadness, but with a smile nevertheless*). But in that case, I shall be not the woman I was, nor the woman I am, but still another!

Ludovico. Another? Yes! The woman you are going to be!

Ersilia (*looks at him in amazement*). I? (*With a slight gesture of her two hands, which have hitherto been limply folded on her knees*). I have never been anything! I have never been anybody!

Ludovico. Oh now—wait! You've never been anybody?

Ersilia. Nobody—ever!

Ludovico. But you are yourself!

Ersilia. Who am I? What am I?

Ludovico. First of all, you're a sweet, charming, beautiful, little girl!

Ersilia (*shrugging her shoulders*). Good looking? I doubt that! But even if I were, I've never been able to profit by it!

Ludovico. That's important, it's true. In fact, it may even occur to a girl . . . in sheer despair . . . to make an extreme resolution at last, let herself go, throw herself haphazard upon life!

Ersilia (*looking at him fearfully*). Oh, how can you say that?

Ludovico. No, I wasn't referring to you! It came into my mind, I suppose, because I had thought of her, the girl in the novel, in that way! (*Speaking as though he could see the character before his eyes and improvising.*) Despair! Not knowing what to do! Evening! The hall bedroom of a hotel! Then she looks into the mirror and—a sudden decision! A mad resolution! Her bill from the landlord!

In her purse a penny or two! And the clerk is insisting on his money!

Ersilia (*starting with great terror*). Did they put that in the papers?

Ludovico. No! I invented it! (*Looking at her in delight.*) Do you mean that this was actually the case with you?

Ersilia (*hardly able to utter the word*). Yes!

Ludovico (*beaming with pleasure*). Well! Well! Well! So I guessed it right! You went down into the street that night? . . .

Ersilia (*faintly*). Yes! Yes!

Ludovico. . . . and—it was like this: a man came along the street . . . a man . . . anyone at all! Wasn't that it?

Ersilia (*covering her face, with a shudder of horror*). . . . and not knowing how to go about it . . .

Ludovico. How to ask him?

Ersilia (*nodding, with her face still covered*). Yes!

Ludovico (*as though he understood the situation perfectly*). And he refused, eh?

Ersilia (*looking at him wildly, her lips apart. She nods in the affirmative*). Yes!

Ludovico (*beaming with pleasure again*). So I got even the details, even the details—to perfection! And then—disgust! Repentance! Loathing for that ugly and fruitless effort! To perfection! To perfection! (*Ersilia bursts into sobs, and the novelist, quickly.*) But no, why do you feel so bad about it? It's all over now! No! No! Please don't cry! (*He stoops and tries to put his arm reassuringly about her shoulders.*)

Ersilia. Don't touch me! Let me go! I want to go away!

Ludovico. But why? Why go away?

Ersilia. Now that you know this!

Ludovico. But I knew it already! I knew it already!

Ersilia. How did you know it already?

Ludovico. Because I imagined it that way—in the novel! Don't you see? I was right! That's the way it happened! Exactly as it happened!

Ersilia. But I am so ashamed! (*At this moment an unusually violent burst of noise comes from down the street, apparently because of some collision or other: a crash of vehicles, screams, cries, oaths, hoots, threats.*)

Ludovico. Ashamed? Why? Don't say that! . . . (*He breaks off and turns toward the window.*) But what the devil has happened?

Ersilia. They're shouting! There's been an accident or something! (*The uproar increases. Cries of* "Help! Help!" *The door to the left opens and Signora Onoria rushes headlong into the room.*)

Onoria. They've run over a poor old man! I guess he's killed! Right here in front of the house! (*She runs to one of the windows while Ludovico and Ersilia hurry toward the other. With the window open, the noise in the street holds the stage for some time. An automobile has collided with a wagon. In trying to avoid the wagon, the chauffeur turned his car across a sidewalk, running over an old man who was not quick enough to get out of the way. The victim is dying, or perhaps dead. People are standing about him. The ambulance comes clanging up in the midst of the shouting and confusion and hurries away again. What is going on is made clear by the various sounds, exclamations, words that are distinguishable in the general clamor.*)

Voices in the Street. Oh, oh! Poor fellow! Help! Help! Ran across his chest! Give him air! Arrest him! Arrest him! He's dead! Poor old man! Hurry! Hurry! Don't let him get away! Back broken! Dead! He

made a sharp turn! He had the right of way! No, no! It isn't true! Hang him! Hang him! He ought to be in jail! These speeders! Give him air! No! He's dead! Poor fellow! Hurry! Hurry! The police station! No, the hospital! Here's his hat! Here's his hat! The murderer! They ought to hang him! (*The agitation on the sidewalk is reflected in the gestures and exclamations of the three people at the windows.*)

Onoria. He's dead! He's dead! Poor old man! Oh, don't let him get away! He was trying to get away! He looks like a murderer! He's trying to excuse himself! Flattened him out like a toad!

Ersilia (*springing back from the window horrified*). Oh, how terrible! How terrible!

Ludovico (*stepping back also and closing the window*). Poor devil! Probably he has a family! (*Irritated by the noise.*) Please, Signora, close the window!

Onoria. They've carried him away! (*Shutting the window.*) But he's dead by this time!

Ludovico. If he's not dead already, he will be by the time they get him to the hospital!

Onoria. I'm going downstairs to find out about it! How terrible! How terrible! (*She ambles, in her usual fussy manner, out of the room. The noises in the street gradually die down.*)

Ludovico. Filthy street this is! They never clean it up! And when it rains you can hardly paddle your way through the mud! And just one jam of traffic: carts, trucks, automobiles, everything! And they permit pushcarts there into the bargain! Just imagine! Pushcarts!

Ersilia (*after a pause, staring horror-stricken into space in front of her*). The street! The street! How terrible!

Ludovico. What a school for a man who writes! For a man like myself! Oh, you can free yourself from all com-

mon, vulgar concerns! Your imagination lifts you above all this! You soar to the clouds! But down there is the street with its people going to and fro! All the noises of life, the life of other people, foreign to you, but still present before your mind, ringing in your ears; intruding on your thoughts; interrupting; deforming everything . . . But we are going to be together, aren't we? We're going to work out a pretty story together, aren't we? Yes! Just imagine; supposing I were the old man who was just run over down in the street there! What would you be doing here in such circumstances? But you had your life broken into once by something like that, didn't you? An accident! A child falling from the roof!

Ersilia. Oh!

Ludovico. You think of something, and a hawker barks, out in the street, or a newsboy comes along—and your ideas . . . good-bye! It's as though two fingers were stretched out into space to catch the lark by the tail just as it is soaring to the sky to greet the sunshine in its joy . . . and pull it back to earth again!

Ersilia. You are a servant in a house, obedient to other people!—yourself? Nobody! Nothing! How terrible! To feel one's self just nobody! Alone in the world! No one even thinking of you as a person! And to me—the street . . . I saw my life as though it had no real existence! As though it were a dream . . . just things about me! A few people in the garden at noon! Trees! A settee! Chairs! And I refused to be just nobody—to be just nothing!

Ludovico. Ah, as for that, now! No, that isn't true!

Ersilia. It isn't true? I made up my mind to kill myself!

Ludovico. Yes, but making a good story out of it!

Ersilia (*fearful again*). What do you mean—a good story? Do you think I was inventing it all?

Ludovico. No! No! I was thinking of myself! You made a good story for me by just telling of your experiences!

Ersilia. When they picked me up in the garden there?

Ludovico. Yes! And later on at the hospital! How can you have been nobody if your story aroused so much pity in everyone? You can't imagine the impression you made in the town when the newspapers came out with it! The interest you aroused! You have a proof of it in me and in those letters in your handbag, in all the offers you received! Ten! Ten or more!

Ersilia. Have you kept them?

Ludovico. Kept what?

Ersilia. The newspapers! I would like to read the story myself, with my own eyes! Have you kept them?

Ludovico. Why, perhaps! I imagine I could find one!

Ersilia. Please look for it! Please hunt it up! I would like to see it!

Ludovico. But no, why should you bother with all that now?

Ersilia. I want to see what the papers said! Please! I must read it for myself!

Ludovico. I imagine they printed just what you told them.

Ersilia. But I don't remember what I said at such a time! I should like to see it! I should like to read about it! Please try to find the paper!

Ludovico. I wonder where it could be . . . all this rubbish here . . . I never was very neat! What do you say —let's wait a while! We'll come across it later on!

Ersilia. It gave the whole story? Was it very long?

Ludovico. At least three columns on the front page! Summer time . . . not much doing! When the reporters get hold of a story like yours, they eat it up!

Ersilia. But him . . . what did they say of him?

Ludovico. Why, that he had jilted you!

Ersilia. No, not him! I mean . . . I mean . . . the other! The other one!

Ludovico. The consul?

Ersilia (*greatly shocked*). Did they say he was a consul?

Ludovico. Yes, our consul at Smyrna!

Ersilia (*still in great alarm*). Oh dear, dear! They even told where it happened! They promised me they wouldn't!

Ludovico. Oh yes . . . but these reporters! . . .

Ersilia. But they didn't need to, did they? The story was just as good even if it didn't tell where it happened or who was concerned? Well, what did they say?

Ludovico. They said that when the baby fell from the roof! . . .

Ersilia (*covering her face with her hands*). Oh, poor little thing! Poor little thing!

Ludovico. After the baby fell from the roof, the consul was fearfully cruel toward you!

Ersilia. Oh no, he wasn't! It was his wife! It was his wife!

Ludovico. They said he was too!

Ersilia. Oh, no, not he! His wife! Oh dear dear me!

Ludovico. Because his wife was jealous of you! Oh, I can imagine her, strapping big woman, a regular grenadier. . . .

Ersilia. Oh no, she wasn't! Not at all! She was a tiny, little thing! Slender, all shriveled up, yellow! She was a lemon!

Ludovico. Oh now, wait, now! Why, you know, I can just see her! She's this way! Tall, dark-haired, her eyebrows joining over her nose! I could paint her picture!

Ersilia. But she wasn't that kind of woman at all!

Who knows how you must have imagined me! No, no! She's just as I said!

Ludovico. Yes, but that doesn't matter! For my purposes I needed a big woman, while the baby was small and slight . . . a tiny thing . . . emaciated!

Ersilia. Emaciated? Tiny? My Mimetta? Oh dear me!

Ludovico. I called it Titì!

Ersilia. Not Titì! Mimetta . . . and a beautiful child! Fat as butter! She would toddle around on her little fat legs, her rosy cheeks, and her golden curls shaking all over her head! And she was so fond of me! I was the only one she liked!

Ludovico. So naturally the mother was jealous of you on that account as well!

Ersilia. Oh yes, I should say so, especially on the baby's account! And it was her fault, you know! For when that other man came, on the cruiser . . .

Ludovico. The ensign in the navy?

Ersilia. Yes . . . that night she put me, on purpose, in a situation where I would be very likely to succumb! Alone there! In that garden! Palm trees all around me! And the fragrance of the flowers! How sweet! How wonderful! Drugged with perfume!

Ludovico. Oh, a magnificent story! Magnificent! Full of color, you see! The sea; sunshine; fragrance; night in the Levant!

Ersilia. If it had not been so terrible for me! . . .

Ludovico. With that hellhound of a woman! . . . I can just imagine her! Treachery, you see—the treachery of a person who has never known what love is, and who understands that the joy she prepares for another woman will soon be destroyed in a most terrible misfortune! Magnificent!

Ersilia. I wish you could have seen her! As kind toward me as my own mother! He had asked for my hand quite formally, applying to her and to the consul! They were my guardians, you see! Oh, my own way in everything! But then when he went away! (*Horrified.*) How can a person change so suddenly! An irritation you can't understand! Nothing suited her any more! Just one humiliation after another for me! And then at last—I was blamed for the accident!

Ludovico. While it was she who sent you out of the house on some errand or other! . . .

Ersilia (*turning on him suddenly, deeply impressed, and in some alarm*). Who said that?

Ludovico. It was in the papers!

Ersilia. That too?

Ludovico. You must have said so yourself!

Ersilia. No, I don't remember saying that! I don't believe I said it!

Ludovico. Do you think I imagined it, then? Probably some newspaper man invented it to color up the cruelty of your dismissal a bit! . . . For you were sent away, and they didn't even give you money for your ticket home! That much is true?

Ersilia. Yes, that's true! That's true!

Ludovico. Almost as though you could be made to pay in money for the death of the child!

Ersilia. And she threatened me with that, you know! Yes, she did! She did! And she would have had me arrested for it if she hadn't been afraid that certain things might be found out!

Ludovico. Certain things about her? Ah, so it's true, then!

Ersilia (*embarrassed*). No! I don't mean . . . anyhow I'm sorry the papers said that she sent me away! I

would like to forget all about what happened out there! I'm thinking of the journey home! Oh, how I suffered! I'm sure that that poor baby, buried in her grave, came away on the steamer with me just the same so as not to be left there with those cruel parents! And I felt this way . . . it seemed as though I lost her when I went down into the street from my hotel that night!

Ludovico. But when you got here, if I may ask, you didn't look him up?

Ersilia. How could I look him up? I didn't know his address! I wrote him in care of general delivery! Then I went to the Navy Building!

Ludovico. Well?

Ersilia. They told me he had resigned his commission!

Ludovico. But you should have followed him up, to make him atone for the crime, the downright crime, he committed against you!

Ersilia. I never was good at asserting my rights!

Ludovico. He had promised to marry you!

Ersilia. I was crushed! When they told me that he was to be married the next day, the sense of his betrayal, which was so cruel and so unexpected, came over me so strongly that I was crushed! I had only a little money left! And the thought of actually having to beg! . . . In the garden there with that poison in my hand I thought of the little child, and I gathered courage from the feeling that having lost her the evening before I would then be going to find her again!

Ludovico. Oh come, come! Let's not think of those things now! Try to cheer up, little girl!

Ersilia (*after a pause and with a smile of deepest sadness*). Yes, but at least, let me be that woman . . .

Ludovico. That woman? What woman?

Ersilia. The woman you imagined! Dear me! If I

amounted to something at least once in my life, as you have said, I want to be in your novel, myself, but I, you understand, I, the woman I am! It seems quite unfair that you should see another woman in me!

Ludovico (*laughing*). That's a great idea! It's as though she were robbing you, eh?

Ersilia. Why yes! You are stealing things that happened to me; you are stealing my life, the life that I had decided to do away with! I lived that life to the very depths of despair and it seems that now, if you don't mind, I have a right to be in the story you make of it . . . a beautiful story, like a novel I read of yours. It is called—wait—what did you call it? *The Outcast*—yes, *The Outcast.*

Ludovico. *The Outcast?* Oh, no, you're mistaken! *The Outcast* was not written by me!

Ersilia (*surprised*). Wasn't that one of your novels?

Ludovico. No!

Ersilia. How strange! I thought . . .

Ludovico. In fact, it's by a writer whom I cordially detest!

Ersilia (*mortified, covering her face with her hands*): Dear me! Dear me!

Ludovico. Now, now, what does that all matter? You are mixing it up with some other book. (*Ersilia begins to weep, still covering her face with her hands.*) But you're not really hurt, are you? My dear, what are you crying for? Why should I care about a little mistake like that? It's a bad novel all right; but I'm not insulted just because you thought I wrote it!

Ersilia. No, you see that's the way it always is with me! Nothing ever, ever comes out right! (*There is a knock at the door to the Left.*)

Ludovico. Yes! Come in! Come right in! (*It is*

Signora Onoria, now all smiles, all honey, and absurdly sentimental over what she has learned.)

Onoria. May I come in? (*She looks about the room for Ersilia.*) Where is the poor little thing? (*She stops and joins her hands in a gesture of pity as she sees Ersilia weeping.*) Oh, the poor little thing—in tears?

Ludovico (*in astonishment, unable to understand the sudden change in the woman's manner*). Why, what's the matter?

Onoria. You might have told me she was the girl the newspapers were talking about! Signorina Drei, isn't it? Ersilia Drei! Poor child! You poor thing! I am so glad you are well again and out of the hospital! I'm delighted to have you here!

Ludovico. But how did you find out that it was she?

Onoria. A great question! Don't you suppose I read the papers?

Ludovico. Yes, but how did you know that she was the girl?

Onoria. Why, because . . . well . . . look at this! (*She hands him a visiting card.*) There's a reporter downstairs, and he told me the whole story!

Ludovico. A reporter . . . here?

Ersilia. A reporter?

Ludovico. What does he want?

Onoria. He says there are a number of important things which the young lady must explain!

Ersilia. Things to explain?

Ludovico. This is too much, upon my word!

Ersilia. What does he want me to explain?

Ludovico. And who told him that the young lady was here?

Onoria. I don't know!

Ersilia. Neither do I! When he interviewed me I

never even dreamed that I would come here to your house!

Ludovico (*almost to himself*). I see! I see! Talking, as usual! (*With a nod in Onoria's direction. Then turning to Ersilia.*) Well, what do you say? Shall we have him come in?

Ersilia. No . . . I . . . no . . . no! I don't know! What shall I say to him? What does he want me to explain?

Ludovico. I'm going to have a talk with the fellow! (*He goes out through the door to the Left.*)

Onoria. Oh, you poor child! If you only knew how I cried when I read your story in the papers . . . such a terrible story!

Ersilia. But what do they want of me now?

Onoria. Perhaps . . . well . . . you know!

Ersilia. Oh dear me! Dear me! I can't endure another ordeal! More trouble would quite kill me!

Onoria. You're not well?

Ersilia. Oh, I'm all right, I think! But here . . . (*she puts a hand to her breast*). I don't know . . . it's hard for me to breathe, somehow! They say I am well; but perhaps there is still something wrong, here! It hurts when I press with my hand, here, and then here, and in my back! Oh, a terrible pain! It seems to run all over me! (*She weeps and groans.*) Dear me! Dear me! (*From the street comes a sudden burst of music from a hurdy-gurdy, playing a popular song.*)

Onoria. Unbutton your waist! Let me see!

Ersilia. No! No! (*Irritated by the music from the hurdy-gurdy.*) Oh, please send that man away! I can't bear it

Onoria. Yes, with pleasure . . . right away! (*She takes a purse from the pocket of her apron.*) With pleasure! (*She goes to the window, opens the lower sash, and calls to the organ grinder below, motioning to him to go away. The*

music continues. Onoria opens her pocketbook, takes out some coins and tosses them down from the window.) There are sick people in the house! (*Again she motions the man away. The hurdy-gurdy breaks off suddenly in the middle of a tune. Onoria closes the window and hurries back to Ersilia's side.*) So there you are! We have sent him away! Now listen to me! You just unbutton your clothes . . .

Ersilia. No, I can't do that! I must be ready! I'm afraid that not even this can last!

Onoria. What? What can last?

Ersilia. Oh, if you only knew! I am so unhappy, so unhappy! I can't endure it! This sash . . . oh! (*She loosens her sash.*) I can't endure it . . . it's too tight . . . it's too tight! I can't bear it! (*Through the door to the Left the sound of talking is heard. It is Ludovico inviting someone to come in.*)

Ludovico. No! No! Go right along! After you, please! (*Alfredo Cantavalle, a newspaper man, enters, followed by the novelist. Cantavalle is a handsome young Neapolitan, pretentious, elegant, and fashionable. He even wears a monocle, but he has the greatest difficulty in keeping it in place. He is a jolly, good-natured, talkative fellow. His hair, parted in the middle like a school boy's falls thick over his forehead. He has a long, fat, ruddy face, His fat legs show almost feminine lines through tight-fitting trousers.*)

Cantavalle. Sorry to trouble you, ladies! Oh, my dear Signorina, you remember me, I am sure!

Ludovico (*introducing*). Signor Alfredo Cantavalle, of the press!

Ersilia. Yes, I remember you!

Cantavalle. I thought you would! (*And noting Signoria Onoria.*) Ah, Signora, you are a relative of this young lady?

Ludovico. No, she is the mistress of the house!

Cantavalle. Oh! Delighted! (*He makes a slight bow.*) I remember in fact that the young lady has no relatives! You just had a serious accident out in front here, I understand.

Ludovico. Yes, a poor old man!

Onoria. How frightened I was!

Cantavalle. He's dead!

Onoria. Dead? He's dead?

Cantavalle. Yes, died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital!

Onoria. Who was he?

Cantavalle. He hasn't been identified yet. (*Turning to Ersilia.*) My dear Signorina, I hope you will allow me not only to congratulate you on your recovery, but to congratulate myself! Yes, it was a great piece of luck, and it turned out all in your favor! The article I wrote about your experiences has had the singular good fortune to be noted by a famous author (*he bows to Ludovico*). But it's all nonsense, Signor Nota, what that friend of yours says. . . . This is the noblest thing you have done in your whole life! (*Again turning to Ersilia.*) You can imagine how pleased I am at hearing it!

Ersilia. Yes, it was wonderful good fortune for me!

Ludovico. Oh, please! What are you talking about?

Cantavalle. No, Signor Nota, she is right! And for other reasons, also! Now we can have the advantage of your co-operation and support—and we need it, I assure you! Shall I explain? . . . If I may venture to speak in the presence of this lady here . . . (*he nods in Onoria's direction*).

Onoria. I'm going right away . . . but the Signorina was not feeling very well!

Ludovico. Not feeling very well?

Onoria. In fact, she was in the greatest distress!

Ludovico. What's the matter?

Ersilia. I don't know . . . I don't know! I have a chill, I guess . . . my nerves!

Onoria. Now you just listen to me! Come into the other room! (*She points to the door, Rear.*)

Ersilia. No! No!

Onoria. Yes, you'd better . . . and just get into bed!

Ludovico. Do so, please, if you're not well!

Onoria. Once she gets her clothes off and goes to bed . . .

Ersilia. No, thank you! I shall be all right! I can stay here!

Cantavalle. The effects of the poison, I suppose! But you'll see . . . with a little care . . .

Ludovico. . . . and a quiet environment! . . .

Onoria. I am always right here, my dear child! If you need anything, call me! I shall be only too glad! . . .

Ersilia. Yes, thank you . . . thank you, Signora!

Cantavalle. In that case I shall be going! Good afternoon, Signorina!

Onoria (*approaching Ludovico and in a whisper*). Don't disturb her now. A little common sense! Can't you see how the poor thing is suffering? (*She withdraws through the door to the Left, which Ludovico closes behind her.*)

Cantavalle. I am so sorry if my coming here . . .

Ludovico (*with some annoyance*). Oh, it's all right, Cantavalle, but get through as soon as you can!

Cantavalle. I can find out what I want to know in two minutes, Signor Nota! Give me just two minutes!

Ludovico. Well, let's come to the point! What is it precisely that that fool consul of yours . . .

Ersilia (*starting in terror*). The consul?

Ludovico. The consul, precisely! (*Speaking to Cantavalle.*) We must put that fellow in his place!

Ersilia (*in great alarm*). What do you mean? The consul is here . . . in town?

Cantavalle. He came down to our office yesterday and raised a terrible rumpus, Signorina!

Ersilia (*moaning in despair*). Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!

Ludovico. And you say he insists on a retraction?

Cantavalle. Yes . . . of everything, he says, of everything!

Ersilia (*to Cantavalle*). Now you can see all the harm you have done! You said things I didn't want you to say, and you promised me you wouldn't.

Cantavalle. I? What harm have I done?

Ersilia. Yes, you! You shouldn't have mentioned the name of the city! You shouldn't have said who the people were!

Ludovico. A general retraction he wants? What do you mean?

Cantavalle. Why, he wants us to deny the whole story, which, he says, is a tissue of falsehoods! One moment, Signor Nota . . . I must answer the young lady! His name, you see, I was careful not to mention!

Ludovico. You did very well to show up a rascal like that!

Cantavalle. No, all I said was "the Italian consul in Smyrna!" Who the devil cares who the consul in Smyrna is! Who is ever going to know? I didn't even know myself! And I don't know even now! Anyhow, the last thing in the world I should ever have expected was that he would come tearing into our office yesterday like a bull in a crockery shop!

Ersilia (*again moaning in despair*). Oh dear! Oh dear!

Ludovico. So he came to Rome, eh? All on account of this?

Cantavalle. Not on account of this exactly! He came

on account of an accident that happened to his baby! That was in the story, to be sure! He came because his wife, as he says, is in a terrible state of mind! In short, an impossible situation, there, in Smyrna!

Ersilia. Yes, that woman! That woman!

Cantavalle. He came on home to ask for a transfer; but he has seen the newspapers! A pretty mess we are in, Signor Nota!

Ludovico. But why?

Cantavalle. Why? Why, the man has an official position, you understand! He is certain to bring a suit against my paper . . . a suit for libel!

Ludovico. But what did the article have to say about him, after all?

Cantavalle. Nothing but lies, as he claims . . . things very much to his discredit!

Ludovico. Lies? Were they lies?

Ersilia. I don't know! I haven't seen your article! I don't know what you may have said of him or of his wife or of the accident!

Cantavalle. I assure you, Signorina, that I reported exactly what you said! Nothing more, nothing less! Oh, of course, I was very much affected by your story and my style . . . well . . . but as regards matters of fact, I didn't change a thing! You can see for yourself, if you just look at the paper!

Ludovico (*beginning to rummage around the room*). I am sure I had it here! It must be here somewhere!

Cantavalle. Never mind, I'll send you a copy! But as you can well see, Signorina, I have come here to find out from you what I am to do in the face of the complaint and the threat of this gentleman!

Ersilia (*with a convulsive burst of anger, and almost*

hissing as she speaks). He has nothing to complain of, that man! And as for his threats! . . .

Cantavalle. All the better, in that case . . . all the better!

Ersilia. Oh dear me! Oh dear me! I am so tired! I don't feel well! (*She begins to sob, shivering and shaking all over, her weeping soon rising to a shrill note that might be mistaken for laughter. Finally she falls back in a faint.*)

Ludovico (*running to her anxiously and helping Cantavalle hold her up and to keep her from slipping to the floor*). Ersilia! Ersilia! Please!

Cantavalle. Oh, Signorina! No! Please! Please! Don't worry, please!

Ludovico. What's the matter? Oh, please don't! Everything is all right!

Cantavalle. There's nothing to be afraid of, Signorina!

Ludovico. She's gone! Fainted! Just call the lady, will you please?

Cantavalle (*running to the door, Left*). Signora! Signora!

Ludovico (*also calling*). Signora Onoria!

Cantavalle. Signora Onoria! Signora Onoria! (*He goes out into the hall.*)

Ludovico. Oh no! Ersilia dear! No! No! Be a good girl! Everything is all right! (*Cantavalle returns with Signora Onoria. She has a bottle of smelling salts in her hand.*)

Onoria. Here I am! What's the matter? Oh, poor child! There! There! Just hold her head up . . . a little higher . . . there we are! Poor child! (*She puts the bottle of smelling salts to Ersilia's nose.*) And I told you men not to trouble her! She is not in a condition to be disturbed!

Cantavalle. Ah, she is coming to again!

Ludovico. We must get her into the other room to bed!

Onoria. Just a moment! Just a moment!

Ludovico. Ersilia!

Onoria. There! There! Poor child! Now you're all right! Come now . . . brace up!

Ludovico. Yes! Yes! Poor little girl! Ersilia! Ersilia!

Cantavalle. I'm so sorry, Signorina, but everything is all right! Everything is all right!

Ersilia (*almost laughing, in a tone of childish wonder*). Oh dear me, did I fall?

Ludovico. No! Why? No, you didn't fall—but you scared us almost to death!

Ersilia. I didn't fall?

Ludovico. Oh no! What were you dreaming of?

Onoria. And now, poor child, just see if you can stand on your feet!

Ludovico. Yes! Now there! Gently, now . . . careful!

Ersilia. Oh, I thought it was . . . as if suddenly . . . I don't know . . . as though I were made of lead! (*She looks up and sees Cantavalle. A nervous terror runs over her. She leaps to her feet.*) Oh no! No! (*She staggers and is again about to fall. Ludovico and Onoria catch her in their arms.*)

Ludovico. No, Ersilia! What's the matter? What's the matter?

Ersilia. Let me go! Let me go!

Onoria. Yes! Yes! All right! But now we are going into the other room!

Ludovico. And you lie down on the bed! Yes! Now then, there you are! See? We won't let you fall!

Onoria. Careful now . . . careful! And I'll stay with

you in there! You can lie down and be all cozy and comfortable!

Ludovico. You will rest up a little, and everything will be all right!

Ersilia. I can't endure it! I am all tired out! I can't endure it!

Onoria (*blocking Ludovico in the doorway, Rear*). You stay in here! I'll attend to her! (*She helps Ersilia into the bedroom.*)

Ludovico. If you ask me, I'd say that they've tormented that poor girl long enough!

Cantavalle. I hope you don't blame me! I am more sorry than I can tell you, Signor Nota; but unfortunately you don't know the worst of it yet! There's more trouble ahead for the young lady!

Ludovico. More trouble?

Cantavalle. Yes! And I think you ought to know about it! The consul brought the matter up while he was in our office!

Ludovico. You just tell that consul to go to the devil!

Cantavalle. Now not quite so fast! You know, Signor Nota—oh, my article had a perfectly marvelous effect! It seems that the girl who was going to marry the boy in the story is indignant at the trick he played on this young lady here, so she has called the wedding off! Understand?

Ludovico. Called the wedding off?

Cantavalle. My article was a corker, I can tell you! Not only that! When the story came out the girl called off her marriage, as I said, but it seems her young man saw the light and he has repented too! What do you think of that? Oh, I got the right touch into my story of her suicide! That boy has lost his head completely!

Ludovico. You mean the ensign in the navy?

Cantavalle. Yes! His name . . . wait . . . I think

his name is Laspiga! Anyhow, he's lost his head completely! So the consul said, at any rate!

Ludovico. And how did he find it out?

Cantavalle. Why, it seems that the girl's father went and looked him up at the Foreign Office! It was the old man who told the consul!

Ludovico. Some mixup, I'll say!

Cantavalle. Yes, especially from your point of view, since now you're involved yourself!

Ludovico. Why?

Cantavalle. And me, too, for that matter! Just imagine . . . here I am with a libel suit, probably, on my hands!

Ludovico. But this old man—the father of the young lady?

Cantavalle. He is raising the very devil! The girl, at first, was angry but later on, you understand . . . there she was about to be married . . . well . . . just what you might expect! Tears; convulsions; hysterics—a pretty mess! The consul you see, became acquainted with Laspiga out there in Smyrna. Signorina Drei was a governess in the consul's house.

Ludovico. So the consul looked up Laspiga?

Cantavalle. Yes!

Ludovico. It's not hard to guess what the ensign told him! The consul blames Signorina Drei for the death of the baby! (*At this point through the door on the Left, which has been left open, Franco Laspiga rushes upon the stage, pale, trembling, in the greatest agitation, his face showing the livid pallor that comes from many sleepless nights. Laspiga is twenty-seven years old, light-haired, tall, slender, fashionably dressed.*)

Laspiga. I beg your pardon! May I come in? Ersilia . . . where is she? Is she here? Where is she?

Ludovico (*in astonishment at this unexpected visit*). But, who are you?

Laspiga. I am Franco Laspiga. Signorina Drei tried to kill herself on my account!

Cantavalle. Ah! Signor Laspiga! Ah!

Ludovico. You here too!

Laspiga. I went to the hospital, but she had already left, so I hurried to the office of a newspaper where I found out . . . (*He stops and looks at Cantavalle.*) I beg your pardon . . . you are Signor Ludovico Nota?

Cantavalle. Why no . . . there's Signor Nota!

Laspiga. Oh, you are Signor Nota?

Ludovico. Yes . . . but how is this? So everybody knows then?

Cantavalle. But my dear Signor Nota, you forget who you are!

Ludovico (*very much annoyed and raising his arms in helplessness*). I give up!

Cantavalle. Your generous, your magnificent, act has naturally made an impression in town!

Laspiga (*surprised*). Magnificent act! What have you done? Tell me! Isn't she here?

Ludovico (*to Cantavalle*). I had no intention of seeking notoriety for myself, and much less, notoriety in connection with this young lady!

Cantavalle. Oh, please, what do you mean?

Ludovico. I am disgusted with this sudden popularity of mine! (*To Laspiga.*) You will believe me when I say that the young lady has been here less than an hour!

Laspiga. Oh, so she is here then! Where is she? Where?

Ludovico. Why, I went to meet her at the hospital . . .

Laspiga. You did? Well?

Ludovico. She had no place to go, so I offered her this

apartment here! This evening of course I shall go to a hotel myself!

Laspiga. I am very grateful to you!

Ludovico. And why, pray? I suppose . . . because I'm not so young as I might be—that's why you're grateful to me! Well, never mind! Why did you come here?

Laspiga. Why? I came to make good, sir! Make good for the harm I have done . . . throw myself at her feet . . . compel her to forgive me!

Cantavalle. That's the way to talk! Good for you! It's all a decent fellow could do!

Ludovico. But you might have thought of it a little sooner, it seems to me!

Laspiga. You're right! Yes! I didn't realize! I had tried deliberately to forget her! I passed whole days . . . But where is she . . . in the other room? Let me see her!

Ludovico. At just this moment I should prefer . . .

Laspiga. No, let me have a talk with her, please!

Cantavalle. It might be better, perhaps, to let her know you are here . . .

Ludovico. She's in bed!

Cantavalle. The joy of seeing you again might . . .

Laspiga. Is she still sick? Is she still in danger?

Ludovico. She fainted, right here, a few moments ago!

Cantavalle. Then—you understand—any more excitement might . . .

Laspiga (*in a frenzy*). I didn't realize . . . I couldn't imagine that my leaving her . . . oh, what an end! All of a sudden, right across my life . . . breaking everything to pieces . . . the newsboys shouting those headlines in the papers! It was as if someone had seized me and hurled me to the ground! Our names called out in the streets! My fiancée . . . her father . . . her mother . . . our neighbors in the house where we lived . . . so I went as fast as I could

to the hospital! They wouldn't let me see her! Oh, how I have wronged her; how I have wronged everybody! The whole world seems to be full of the wrong that I have done! And I can't endure it! I must make up for it somehow! I must undo what I have done!

Cantavalle. Splendid! Splendid! Just what is needed here! You couldn't beat that ending to the story! I am delighted, Signor Nota, delighted! (*At this moment Signora Onoria appears in the doorway, Rear, her two hands raised to suggest silence. She closes the door behind her and comes forward.*)

Onoria. Not so loud! Not so loud, please! She heard everything you said!

Laspiga. She knows that I am here?

Onoria. Yes! She does! And she is all worked up! She's in agony! She says she'll jump out of the window if you go in there!

Laspiga. What? Why should she do that? Won't she forgive me?

Cantavalle (*speaking at the same time*). Why, the idea! On the contrary, she ought . . .

Onoria. No, she's an angel! But she says she refuses!

Ludovico. Refuses what?

Onoria (*to Laspiga*). She says that you should go back to the girl you were to marry!

Laspiga (*speaking up quickly and raising his voice in determination*). No! That's all over, all over!

Onoria. She doesn't want any harm to come to another girl through her!

Laspiga. I refuse! What other girl? She is the girl I want to marry! She, and no one else!

Onoria. No, never mind that! She refuses to consider such a proposition!

Laspiga. But I came here to get her forgiveness, to make amends for all the harm that I have done her!

Onoria. Please, please, not so loud! She can hear if you raise your voice like that!

Laspiga (*to Ludovico*). Won't you go in and explain to her? Try to bring her to reason!

Ludovico. Why, yes! This, certainly, would be the best way out for her!

Cantavalle. I should say so! It would settle everything!

Laspiga. Tell her to forget all about what has happened! Tell her that I am here . . . that my first duty is toward her. Tell her not to spoil this chance we now have to settle everything in time! Please go in and see her! Please! (*Ludovico withdraws through the door, Rear.*)

Onoria. She is doing it for the sake of that other girl!

Laspiga. But I have broken with her, absolutely! It's all over! Absolutely all over!

Onoria. She refuses! She refuses!

Laspiga. But how can that be? I've broken with the girl! It's all over, and that's all there is to it! I can't change again now! It's a question of myself . . . here . . . inside me! I can't, because now everything has come back to me!

Cantavalle. Ah, yes . . . the past! You remember the past now?

Laspiga. Something that I had almost forgotten . . . something that . . . oh, I don't know how . . . had gotten to be so far, far away . . . more like a dream than anything else . . . so that I . . . it was as though I had never given the promise there, that night—a promise such as a person makes in those circumstances! Yes, because then you almost have to make them!

Cantavalle. And then . . . later on . . . it all goes out of your mind, eh?

Laspiga (*continuing vehemently*). Why, I imagined there was no particular obligation! . . . I supposed I was quite free! I kept getting letters from her. But I burned them—unable somehow to take them seriously! And yet, it's incredible! I don't understand how I was able to lie like that . . . lie to myself . . . do what I have done while, meantime, the promise I had given to her had, in fact, not been withdrawn! It was almost like a dream for me, you see! But there my promise stood! It was true . . . true . . . so true, indeed, that when she came here, my betrayal, my treachery toward her . . . oh, now I understand! For her it was the same as it was for me! Those newsboys calling in the street . . . and reality was suddenly there, before my eyes! And it struck me down! Crushed me! Annihilated me! (*Ludovico re-enters from the door, Rear. He is wearing a very long face. There is a note of perplexity, but still of determination, in his voice.*)

Ludovico. It's no use! For the moment it's impossible!

Laspiga. What do you mean! How can that be?

Ludovico. She has promised to see you tomorrow!

Laspigo. Tomorrow? That's ridiculous! I can't wait till tomorrow! I can't stand another night . . . no!

Ludovico. But you'll have to! For the moment there's nothing that can be done.

Laspiga. But I haven't had a wink of sleep for days! Let me have just one word with her at least!

Ludovico. There's no use insisting! It would be worse for you, if you were to see her!

Laspiga. But why?

Ludovico. Let's give her a night to think it over! I talked to her! I told her what you . . .

Laspiga. But why does she refuse? On account of that woman? But that's all off! I don't understand! If she tried to kill herself on my account, why does she refuse?

Ludovico. She'll come around all right! She'll probably do what you want in the end! But man alive, give her a chance to pull herself together!

Cantavalle. And you might calm down a bit, yourself!

Laspiga. I can't! I can't!

Ludovico. Now you just listen to me! I'm quite sure that tomorrow everything will come out all right! We'll bring her around! (*Turning to Signora Onoria.*) Meantime, you go in to her, please. We mustn't leave her alone!

Onoria. Yes! Yes! Of course I will go right in! But you'd better turn the lights on, eh? It's getting dark! (*She goes out through the door, Rear. Ludovico turns on the lights.*)

Ludovico. Now we had better be going, don't you think?

Laspiga. But can't I even see her?

Ludovico. You can see her tomorrow and have a talk with her. I'll come here with you myself. But now we'd better be going! (*He picks up his hat and cane and stands waiting for the others to precede him through the door.*)

Cantavalle. But she ought to see that this solution is the best one for her!

Ludovico. For the moment we've got to leave her alone! Let her quiet down a little! She's not well, poor thing! It's too much for her! Shall we go now?

Laspiga (*stopping in the doorway, Left*). But I thought that on my coming here . . .

Ludovico (*pushing Cantavalle toward the door*). After you, Cantavalle!

Cantavalle. Thank you, Signor Nota! (*He goes to the door.*)

Ludovico (*to Laspiga*). After you, sir! On the contrary, your coming here . . . (*He follows Laspiga out, closing the door behind him. The stage is left empty for a moment. The noises from the street continue. The door,*

Rear, is thrown open and Ersilia appears. She is buttoning the last buttons on her waist. Signora Onoria follows close behind her.)

Ersilia. No, I am going away! I am going away!

Onoria. But where would you go?

Ersilia. I don't know, but I am going away!

Onoria. That's a foolish thing to do!

Ersilia. Oh, I must drop out of sight, somewhere! I must disappear . . . down there, in the street! I don't know! (*She starts to put on her hat.*)

Onoria (*restraining her*). No! No! I won't let you do any such thing!

Ersilia. Let me go! Let me go! I refuse to stay here a moment longer!

Onoria. But why?

Ersilia. I don't know—because I don't want to see anyone! I don't want to talk with anyone!

Onoria. Which means that you won't see him tomorrow?

Ersilia. No! No! I won't see anyone! Let me go!

Onoria. You won't have to see anyone! I'll tell Signor Nota! Don't worry!

Ersilia. Was it my fault if they saved my life?

Onoria. Your fault? Nonsense! Your fault!

Ersilia. But they're accusing me! They're accusing me!

Onoria. But who is accusing you?

Ersilia. They are all accusing me . . . didn't you hear?

Onoria. Not at all, child! He came to ask your forgiveness!

Ersilia. Ah, forgiveness! I talked about him because I was going to die! But now . . . I have had enough of it . . .

Onoria. Very well! Let it go at that! You can tell Signor Nota all about it tomorrow!

Ersilia. I thought I could stay here in peace! . . .

Onoria. And why can't you stay here if you want to?

Ersilia. Because, you'll see! They'll keep after him . . . they'll annoy him! They'll wear him out!

Onoria. Signor Nota?

Ersilia. Signor Nota!

Onoria. I don't believe it! He's a bit of a crank, Signor Nota is; but he's a good kind man at bottom! You'll see! He's a very good man!

Ersilia. But there's that other man!

Onoria. What other man?

Ersilia. That other man! I didn't even mention his name! He's going to bring a suit against the paper!

Onoria. The consul?

Ersilia. The consul! He will never let me alone! (*Again rising to her feet.*) Oh! Oh! Let me go! Let me go!

Onoria. But no! Sit down! You just be quiet now! Signor Nota will see about that man! He will keep him in his place! Besides, how can he harm you after the way he's treated you? Don't you worry! You just sit down, here! Don't you see you're hardly fit to be up?

Ersilia. Yes! Yes! That's so! Oh, what can I do?

Onoria. Supposing you go in and lie down again . . . that's a good girl! I will bring you a cup of broth to drink! You'll get a little rest, and then you'll feel better!

Ersilia (*timidly, in a low voice, as one woman, confidingly, to another*). But you understand, don't you? I am just as you saw me and . . .

Onoria. And what?

Ersilia. I haven't a thing, not a thing, with me! In the hotel there, I had a bag! I don't know what has become of it! They probably took it to the police station!

Onoria. We'll get it back for you tomorrow! Don't

worry about that! I'll send someone or I'll go and get it myself!

Ersilia. Yes! But now, now, I haven't a thing! I am naked! I am naked . . . naked!

Onoria (*affectionately, comfortingly*). But I'll see to that! I'll see to everything! You just go in to bed and I'll stay with you! Now I'll run downstairs and get something for you! You just lie down and I'll be right back! It won't take me a second! (*She goes out through the door, Left. Ersilia remains seated on the stage, looking in bewilderment around the room. Her head droops to one side as though she were desperately weary. She seems to have difficulty in breathing. She passes a hand across her cold brow. Apparently in fear of fainting again, she rises, walks to a window, and throws it open. It is evening now. The noises in the street have softened. They are less numerous and less varied. Finally they cease altogether. Silence. A company of young men comes down along the sidewalk, talking, laughing, joking. One of them starts a song, but his voice cracks. An uproar of hoots and guffaws. Ersilia returns to her seat at the table. The footfalls of the mirthful company grow faint in the distance and finally are heard no more. Ersilia looks about the room with staring eyes, and in a barely audible voice she murmurs:*)

Ersilia. The street! The street!

Curtain

ACT II

(*The same scene as in Act I. The following morning. The curtain rises on an empty stage. After a time, the door, Left, opens and Franco Laspiga and Ludovico Nota, followed by Emma, the maid, enter. Ludovico has his hat on. Laspiga sets his hat on the chair nearest the door. After a time Ludovico will remove his hat.*)

LUDOVICO (*to the maid*). Is Signora Onoria in?

EMMA (*pointing to the door, Rear*). She's in the other room with the young lady.

LUDOVICO. Did Signorina Drei have a good night?

EMMA. I don't think so. She was not at all well. I don't believe she got a wink of sleep. Nor did the Signora either.

LASPIGA. If I had been able to say a word to her last evening . . .

LUDOVICO (*to the maid*). Won't you just go in and tell Signora Onoria that I am here?

EMMA. Very well, sir! (*She starts toward the door, Rear.*)

LUDOVICO. Was there any mail?

EMMA. Yes sir! Yes sir! There it is on your desk. (*She opens the door, Rear, very softly and goes out.*)

LUDOVICO (*picking up his mail from the desk, and addressing Laspiga.*) Oh, please, have a chair, won't you? Please, have a chair!

LASPIGA. Thank you! I think I'd rather stand!

LUDOVICO (*with a grunt of disgust*). My, how close it is

in here! (*He goes and opens one of the windows, returning to his mail which proves to be nothing but newspapers. It is market time in the street. The noises from the traffic are as loud as ever. At a certain point Ludovico loses patience and pulls the window down again. Then he steps over to Laspiga, with a newspaper open in his hand, pointing with his finger to the headlines of an article.*)

Ludovico. Here we are! Won't you just read this? (*He hands the newspaper to Laspiga.*)

Laspiga (*after looking it over*). A correction? Deny the whole story?

Ludovico. Yes! It says they will publish it tomorrow! (*Through the door, Rear, comes Signora Onoria, followed by Emma, who crosses the stage and goes out, Left.*)

Laspiga (*looking up as Onorio enters, anxiously*). Ah! Here she is! Here she is!

Onoria. (*gesticulating emphatically*). What a night! What a night!

Laspiga. And what is she doing! Won't she come in?

Onoria. She will, if she can! She knows that you are here! She guessed it!

Laspiga. But . . . you see the state that I am in! Didn't you tell her?

Onoria. Don't disturb her, please! She was getting a bit of sleep for the first time, just now.

Ludovico. How can a person sleep in this bedlam?

Onoria. That wasn't it! The maid came in and said you were here with another gentleman! That's what woke her up! I was afraid she would refuse, as she did yesterday.

Laspiga. Oh no! No!

Onoria. Well, she didn't! She said she is willing to see you!

Laspiga. Ah! That's better! She is probably convinced. . . .

Ludovico. Oh, of course! And if she isn't, we'll convince her!

Onoria. I am not so sure of that! Yesterday, after you gentlemen left, she tried to run away!

Ludovico. Run away?

Laspiga. And where? Why did she want to go?

Onoria. Who knows? I had to do my very best to keep her! But one thing I don't understand . . . why did they ever let her out of the hospital? She isn't anywhere near well!

Ludovico (*bored, and rather coldly*). But when she was with me yesterday! . . .

Onoria. Oh, I don't think so! She was doing her best to bear up, you see—trying to conceal her pain! She's so afraid you will be getting tired of all this!

Ludovico. I? Not at all! But . . . now . . . it's rather. . . . (*He nods in Laspiga's direction.*)

Laspiga. Yes, I'll take care of her! I'll make her well again!

Onoria. But now I think I'll go downstairs and lie down for a moment. I'm all worn out! I have not had a wink of sleep! But of course, if there's any need of me! . . .

Ludovico. Yes, by all means!

Onoria. . . . you gentlemen can just call me! (*She starts toward the door, Left, but stops and comes back, speaking to Ludovico.*) One thing perhaps you don't know! The poor child hasn't a thing with her! They took her bag away, either the people in the hotel or the police! We've got to get it back for her!

Ludovico. Yes! Yes! I'll attend to that!

Onoria. But right away, if you can! This morning! She says she is . . . (*Onoria hesitates at the word "naked".*) A girl has got to dress these days, you know. You'll attend to it?

Laspiga. I'll attend to it! I'll attend to it!

Onoria. I think it would be better if you would, Signor Nota!

Ludovico (*again with some annoyance*). Yes, don't worry! Don't worry! (*Then changing tone.*) Now, we're waiting for her to say whether. . . .

Onoria. Oh, please don't be harsh with her!

Ludovico. Ah, I like that! Yesterday you wanted to drive her out of the house, and now. . . .

Onoria. But yesterday I didn't know . . . Oh, now she reminds me of a little stray dog lost on the streets, with all the other dogs after her! And the gentler she is, the more helpless she is, the more they worry her and torment her! The poor child! She is crushed, discouraged! She hardly dares say her soul's her own!

Ludovico (*angrily taking out his handkerchief and blowing his nose*). But now, you understand, things look a little different, even to me!

Onoria. What? Anything about her? (*She nods toward the door, Rear.*)

Ludovico. Why, the whole story! . . . I thought everything was settled! And it is all so different from the way I had imagined it! Things couldn't be worse, really! In the first place, that reporter with his newspaper! Then, there's this gentleman here! (*He points to Laspiga.*) Then there's that consul tearing around and making a fuss! (*Putting his handkerchief back into his pocket, and addressing Laspiga.*) Did you read what it said in the paper there?

Laspiga. But you mean that Grotti, the consul, is here in town?

Ludovico (*angrily*). Where else? He's in town and so is everybody else! It seems that the father of the young lady you were going to marry has had a talk with him!

Laspiga (*in surprise and with some alarm*). Had a talk with him? And why, please?

Ludovico. Oh, who knows? Probably to find out all he can about the situation!

Laspiga (*angrily*). What do they want of me? They slammed the door in my face! But am I to infer that this man Grotti—the consul, that is—has turned against her? (*With a nod toward the door, Rear.*)

Onoria. Oh, they're all against her!

Ludovico. It looks that way! In fact, it's very certain! You understand, I live here, all taken up with my writing. . . .

Laspiga (*angry, talking more to himself than to anybody else*). I should like to know why that man Grotti. . . .

Ludovico. He could probably tell you himself if you asked him! For my part, I'm just a writer . . . and I got interested in this affair because it seemed to me a curious situation—a "slice of life"—where things and people were —naturally—as I had imagined they were. Now, all this mixup . . . one thing after another . . . well, yes . . . I'll speak right out—it's getting on my nerves! It has spoiled things for me! Spoiled things completely! But, fortunately, you are here!

Laspiga. Yes, I am here! I am here!

Onoria. Well, I'll be going, I think! But you gentlemen will just try . . . (*She makes a gesture of warning "be careful!"—with her two hands and goes out through the door, Left.*)

Laspiga (*energetically*). My idea is to take her away off somewhere! I can, you know . . . with my connections! Somewhere away off . . . far away!

Ludovico. But don't get too excited, eh? You see what happens!

Laspiga. Yes, but how about her? (*With a nod toward the door, Rear.*)

Ludovico. It seems to me she's the most unfortunate proof of the danger there is in losing your head! I mean that she is a victim of just that very thing!

Laspiga. Yes, a victim! But why? It was, precisely to keep from losing my head, as you say, that I betrayed her . . . betraying myself first of all! I left the navy . . . I gave up the sea, to drown here, in this way, in the slime of an ordinary humdrum scandal!

Ludovico. Whereas, my dear fellow, at a certain point. . . .

Laspiga (*with increasing intenseness*). No! No! It's when we become convinced that we can't live as we had dreamed of living! It's when we realize that what seemed to us so easy in our dreams—so easy that we could almost lay our hands upon it—has become difficult, impossible to attain! . . .

Ludovico. Yes! But because at certain moments our soul frees itself from all common trivialities. . . .

Laspiga. Yes! Exactly! Exactly!

Ludovico. . . . soars above the petty obstacles of daily life, forgets all about the petty, insignificant needs we ordinarily feel, shakes from its shoulders all commonplace cares. . . .

Laspiga. Exactly! And now free, unshackled, master of itself, it seems to breathe a fresher air . . . it tingles with life, ardor, enthusiasm . . . and the most difficult things, as, I said, become easy. . . .

Ludovico. . . . and everything is possible! Everything is fluid, liquid, smooth-running . . . a state of divine intoxication . . . yes, but this happens only at certain moments, my dear fellow, and those moments pass!

Laspiga (*violently*). Yes, because our souls are not

strong enough! They are unable to bear up under all that inspiration, that's why!

Ludovico (*with a smile*). No, it isn't that! It's because you don't know all the tricks, all the surprises—pleasant and unpleasant—that that soul of yours is playing on you as it breathes there in the airy sublimity of such moments—when it has shaken off all restraints, abandoned all reflection, surrendered utterly to the glory of its dreams! You don't notice those things, but some fine day—and it is an ugly day—you feel yourself pulled down to the solid earth again!

Laspiga. Yes, that's it! But at such times we shouldn't give in—that's the point! We should refuse to come down to the solid earth again! And that's why I tell you that I am going to go back out there, far away . . . take her back to the place where she lived, waiting for me, happy, joyous, confident in the glory of that dream which to me—because my soul, my spirit, had been clouded somehow—had come to look like an attack of madness from which I had recovered —rejoicing even in my recovery, as though I had furnished proof to myself that I was of a very wise and prudent self-control! But now I feel . . . I feel as if I had got back the exaltation which I lost! I have found the soul I had at that time! I have found myself again—and this I owe to her!

Ludovico. But I advise you not to get too excited! Don't lose your head! You'll see how far she has fallen!

Laspiga. But I'll set her on her feet again! I'll make her what she was before! (*The door, Rear, opens and Ersilia appears.*) Oh, here she is now! (*At sight of her his voice faints almost to a whisper.*) Oh! (*Ersilia is pale and wan, her hair falling disheveled over her shoulders. In desperate resolution, she goes straight to Ludovico.*)

Ersilia. I can't! Signor Nota! I can't! I should not have accepted even this much! Your proposal . . . no . . .

it's impossible! I can't! I give it all up! I renounce everything!

Ludovico. But my dear child, what in the world are you talking about! Don't you see who's here! (*pointing to Laspiga*).

Laspiga. Ersilia! Ersilia!

Ersilia. You—why are you calling me! Don't you see who I am? Don't you see what I am? Oh, please! Don't!

Laspiga (*advancing toward her passionately*). I see how you are suffering! I see that you are ill! But you are still my Ersilia . . . my Ersilia . . . and you will be the same Ersilia you have always been!

Ersilia (*recoiling before him*). Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Let me alone!

Laspiga. You talk that way to me? But you belong to me! You must be mine as you used to be!

Ersilia. Oh, this is horrible! I can't endure it! What can I say? How can I make you understand that for me everything was to have been all over—all over!

Laspiga. All over? How can it be all over! I am here with you again?

Ersilia. What you were for me out there you can never be again!

Laspiga. But I can! I can! I am still the same! I am still the same!

Ersilia. No! But even if you were, I must tell you—you should be able to see for yourself!—that I am not and can never be the same!

Laspiga. That isn't so! You tried to kill yourself, but for my sake, you said! Well then . . .

Ersilia (*with desperate resolve*). Well then—it wasn't true!

Laspiga. It wasn't true?

Ersilia. It wasn't true, I say! It was not for your sake!

It was not on your account! Why—I didn't even try to find you when I came here! I was lying!

Laspiga. Lying?

Ersilia. Yes! I gave a reason—a reason which at that particular moment happened to be true . . . but it isn't the reason any longer!

Laspiga. Not the reason any longer? And why not?

Ersilia. Because I, unfortunately . . . I—to my sorrow, am alive now! I am alive again!

Laspiga. Fortunately, I should say! It seems to me the greatest of good fortunes!

Ersilia. No, thank you! Good fortune! You are trying to force me to be the woman I tried to kill! No! No! Enough of that! Enough of her! For her it was on your account, as she said! Leave it that way! But it doesn't hold for me now . . . neither for me nor for you! That's all!

Ludovico. But why doesn't it hold, my dear child?

Laspiga. That was why you tried to kill yourself!

Ersilia. Exactly! Exactly! That was a reason for dying . . . a reason for ending it all! But I didn't die, did I? It doesn't hold any longer!

Laspiga. But I can arrange everything, can't I! I can make everything right!

Ersilia. No! No!

Laspiga. Why not? The reason you had for dying should now be a reason for living, it seems to me!

Ludovico. Of course it should!

Laspiga. That's why I came here!

Ersilia (*with a cold determined voice, pronouncing the syllables one by one and stressing each with a gesture of her two hands, her forefingers crossed over her thumbs*). I doubt if I even know you!

Laspiga (*in surprise*). You don't know me?

(*Ersilia makes a sudden gesture with her two hands wide opened, and falls into a chair—to the amazement of the two men who stand there looking at her as though she were an entirely different person from the one they had supposed her to be. A pause.*)

Ersilia. Don't torment me! (*Another pause, then resuming her former manner.*) Don't you find it hard to recognize me?

Laspiga (*tenderly, in a voice that shows his inner anguish*). Why, no! Of course I don't! Why do you think I should?

Ersilia. Do you know one thing? If I had seen you sooner, I really would not have been able to say . . .

Laspiga. Say what?

Ersilia. That I tried to kill myself on your account! Besides, I didn't! But anyhow, your voice . . . your eyes! . . . Not at all! . . . Is that the voice you talked to me with? Is that the way you looked at me? I thought of you rather . . . well, who knows how I thought of you!

Laspiga (*suddenly chilled*). You are driving me away, Ersilia! You are making me doubt myself . . . and doubt you!

Ersilia. Because you can't understand! You can't! You can't understand what it means for a life to come back upon you like this . . . like . . . like a memory! . . . but a memory which, instead of rising from within you, comes upon you unexpectedly from without—and so changed that you are scarcely able to recognize it! You can't fit it into your life somehow, because you too have changed! Nor can you adapt yourself to it—though you understand all the while that it once was your life, an experience of yours, as you may have been once—though not for yourself, not as you really were . . . the way you talked . . . the way you looked . . . the way you acted . . . in the memory of the other person—but not the way you really were!

Laspiga. But I am the same person, Ersilia! I am going to be the same to you! I want to be the same to you!

Ersilia. But you can't! Don't you understand? You can't! Because as I look at you now, I am certain that you have never been the man I thought you were!

Laspiga. What?

Ersilia. Why are you so surprised? I have noticed that you, too, right here . . . right now, listening to me, seeing me, have been having quite the same impression!

Laspiga. Yes, that's true, but only because you have been saying things . . .

Ersilia. Things that are true! Well, why don't you profit by them? Everybody can, except me! I can't, to be sure! I'm the only one who can't! It's no fault of yours!

Laspiga. But please, please, what's no fault of mine?

Ersilia. What you did to me!

Laspiga. That was no fault of mine? But I am here precisely because I wronged you!

Ersilia. Oh, in life . . . in life people do such things! They can, you know!

Laspiga. But afterwards they feel sorry, as I do—and it's a sincere sorrow I feel! It isn't merely that I recognize my duty toward you!

Ersilia. But supposing you then discover that I am not the woman you thought I was?

Laspiga (*in despair, as she persists in that way*). Oh dear me! What in the world are you talking about?

Ersilia. And for you, too, Signor Nota . . . quite a different person! But I assure you, for you I would have done my very best to be the woman you imagined! And for you . . . yes, for you, I might have succeeded! It would have been a question of living in the fiction you created . . . But life! . . . No! No! You see, life, the life I tried to escape from, refuses to let me go! It has sunk its teeth into

me! It refuses to let me go! And now here they all are upon me again! Where can I go?

Ludovico (*to Laspiga*). I told you so! The young lady needs a rest! Little by little she will get herself in hand again and . . .

Ersilia. You too are trying to hurt me now, Signor Nota?

Ludovico. Hurt you? No, quite the contrary!

Ersilia. But you must realize that it is no longer possible!

Ludovico. Why not, please?

Ersilia. You seemed to have understood it all so well! I suppose for you it can easily be . . . just nothing . . . or if anything, a pleasure! You were supposing many things of an image that existed only in your own mind, but those things I suffered in my living flesh! I actually lived, actually endured the shame, the disgust, the horror of it all!

Ludovico. Oh, is that what you are thinking of?

Ersilia. Tell him! Tell him! Tell him what I did! Then he'll go away?

Ludovico. Not at all! Not at all! No one can blame you for having done that!

Ersilia. Well, then, I'll tell him myself! Look! Out there! On the street! I offered myself to the first man that came along!

Ludovico (*breaking in, anxiously, as Laspiga covers his face with his hands*). But in a moment of despair, the night before she tried to kill herself! Understand?

Laspiga. Yes! Yes! Oh, Ersilia!

Ludovico. The next morning she took poison on a bench in the park because she didn't have enough money left even to pay her bill at the hotel! You understand?

Laspiga. Yes! Yes! I understand! And that makes my sorrow, and my remorse, and my responsibility all the

greater! Oh, I must pay you back for all the harm that I have done you!

Ersilia (*with a cry, exasperated*). No! No! You! Oh!

Laspiga. I, of course! Who else?

Ersilia (*with utter bitterness*). So then you insist! You *will* make me tell it all! You *will* tear it out of me—things a woman would never admit even to herself! (*She pauses a moment to master her emotions, then she says, firmly, decisively, gazing fixedly into space in front of her.*) I measured coldly, deliberately, dispassionately, the disgust I felt, to see whether I would be able to bear up under it! I rouged and powdered my cheeks before going out of the hotel! I had a bottle in my purse . . . a bottle of poison! I was a nurse you see—I had three of those bottles in my bag! I kept them with me all the time—it was a disinfectant! So I rouged my cheeks, and just as you imagined, Signor Nota, I looked at myself in the glass, there, on my dresser in the hotel! I did that not only before I went out that first time! I did it also the second time—when I went out to kill myself! But as I sat there on the bench in the park I did not know, I refused to admit, that I could ever do such a thing! And yet, it wasn't so hard, was it? I could have tried again if circumstances had been favorable! Supposing someone had come along who found me attractive or who was not repulsive to me? Well, in that case I wouldn't have killed myself, would I? I am not sure I would have! Notice—I had rouged my cheeks again, and this time I had even painted my lips, and I had put on my newest dress—on purpose! (*She leaps to her feet.*) But if I am here now . . . well, what does it mean? It means that I overcame the loathing I felt after having a chance to compare that with death! Otherwise I should not be here now, with a man who, without even knowing me, wrote me a letter, offering me shelter, under his roof!

Laspiga (*with sudden decision*). Listen! I know! I know why you talk the way you are talking! I know why you enjoy tormenting yourself like this.

Ersilia (*violently*). I? It is you who are tormenting me!

Laspiga. Ah, you see! You even say so yourself! You regard all this as a cruelty on the part of other people! Well then, won't you let one of those other people make amends for that cruelty, when his conscience has at last awakened?

Ersilia. Make amends? How? By tormenting me still further?

Laspiga. Why, no, of course not!

Ersilia (*hammering on each word*). I tell you I was just pretending! I tell you that it isn't true! I tell you that I lied, and I repeat it! It wasn't anybody's fault! It wasn't your fault! It was life . . . just life! The life I was tired of! The life I tried to escape from! The life that has found me again—oh, how horrible—without my ever having succeeded in getting my feet on the ground! What else need I tell you to drive you away? (*There is a loud knock at the door, Left.*)

Ludovico. What is it?

Emma (*entering*). Signor Grotti is here . . . the consul!

Ersilia (*with a scream*). Ah, here he is! I knew he would come!

Ludovico. Does he want to see me?

Laspiga. I am here too!

Emma. No, he wants to have a word with the Signorina!

Ersilia. Yes! Yes! Let him come in, please! Let him come in! (*To Emma.*) Show him in! (*Emma withdraws.*) It is just as well that I have a talk with him, and the sooner the better! (Grotti, *the consul, enters. He is a man in his late thirties, dark haired, solidly built. On his*

face and in his eyes, an expression of hard and almost cruel reserve. He is wearing a black suit.)

Ersilia. Come in, Signor Grotti! (*Introducing him to Ludovico.*) Signor Grotti, the Italian consul at Smyrna! (*Then to Grotti.*) Signor Ludovico Nota! . . .

Grotti (*with a bow*). A name familiar to me!

Ersilia (*continuing*). Signor Nota was kind enough to offer me hospitality here! (*With a gesture toward Laspiga.*) Signor Franco Laspiga, whom you already know!

Laspiga. You knew me under far different circumstances . . . but now I am here!

Ersilia (*breaking in*). Please! Please!

Laspiga. No! (*Turning to Grotti.*) Look! (*With a gesture toward Ersilia.*) Here is the woman whose hand I asked of you in marriage,—out there!

Ersilia (*in great anger*). Please! Please! No more of that!

Laspiga. I will say no more! (*To Grotti.*) Her anger, the condition you find her in, will explain sufficiently why you see me here!

Ersilia (*impatiently*). Never mind about my condition! I have told you repeatedly that there is no reason for your remaining here, and I am glad to repeat it now in the presence of Signor Grotti so that he may know that, if I am angry, I am angry because you refuse to understand.

Laspiga. Yes, you repeat it because you are aware that the father of the girl I was to marry has had a talk with him!

Ersilia (*in surprise*). No! I didn't know that! (*She looks at Grotti, in dismay, doing her best to control herself.*) Ah, and you . . . you talked to him about me?

Grotti (*coolly, with perfect composure*). No, Signorina, but I promised him I would come and have a talk with you!

Laspiga (*breaking in violently*). It won't do the slightest good, you know!

Ersilia (*with a burst of imperious anger*). I should like to have a word alone with Signor Grotti! (*Turning to Ludovico, her voice softening.*) Won't you let me, Signor Nota?

Ludovico. Why, as far as I am concerned . . . (*He starts to leave the room.*)

Laspiga (*detaining him, resolutely*). No, wait a moment! (*Turning to Ersilia, coldly, on his dignity.*) I shall not intrude, but I must say something here to Signor Grotti so that he may deliver the message to anybody interested! Now *that is all over,* all over! (*With a gesture toward Ersilia.*) That is a point not for her but for me to decide! (*To Ersilia.*) And I insist on this, right here, before you! Hitherto I have begged you, beseeched you, to do as I say! I have consented to listen to the most cruel things from your lips. But now I am through! It is my turn to speak in another tone of voice! You can send me away; but that doesn't mean that I shall ever go back to a woman who, outraged, justly outraged, at the story printed in the papers about you, closed her door in my face in an impulse of displeasure and shame, but now changes her mind, repents, and tries to fix things up in a roundabout way through you, here!

Grotti. Oh, that isn't the point! I didn't come here on that account!

Ersilia. I have told you that anything you may have done was in no way responsible for my trying to kill myself!

Laspiga. That's not so!

Ersilia. What? Signor Nota here can bear me witness!

Laspiga. Yes, he can testify that you said such things! Very well! (*Turning to Grotti.*) She said the most terrible things about herself, "things," as she said, "which a woman would never admit even to herself!" But I have my own sense of what is right and wrong, even if your conscience

compels you to refuse me because of a wrong you may have done to me! But my conduct cannot be modified by anything that he (*With a gesture toward Grotti.*) may say to you, or that you may say to him—in the interest of some third person for whom you are both working together! There! That was what I wanted to say! (*To Ludovico.*) I am ready now, Signor Nota! And I know that you are on my side and that you agree with me! Good morning, Signor Grotti, good morning! (*He starts for the door, Left.*)

Ludovico (*to Ersilia, in a low affectionate voice, trying to encourage and reassure her*). I'll just run out and see about that bag of yours! I hope I can have it here for you very shortly!

Ersilia. Yes, thank you! And you'll forgive me, won't you, Signor Nota?

Ludovico. But my dear girl, there's nothing to forgive you for! Good morning, Signor Grotti!

Grotti. Good morning! (*Ludovico and Laspiga withdraw through the door, Left. The moment the door closes, Ersilia loses her composure. She seems to shrink in upon herself, all of a tremble, looking up fearfully at Grotti, who stands there surveying her with a gaze of cold and hostile scorn. Unable to resist this stare, Ersilia hides her face in her hands, raising one shoulder to cover her cheek, as though to protect herself from the hate he is darting upon her.*)

Grotti (*approaching her, his voice almost a hiss*). You fool! You dunce! You idiot! Lying like that! Just plain stupid lying!

Ersilia (*terrified, without lowering her defense*). But I wanted to die! I really tried to die!

Grotti (*insisting, violently*). And why? And why all the lies after that? And why bring this final remorse upon yourself?

Ersilia (*quick to justify herself*). No, it wasn't for my

own sake! Don't you understand? And he says that I have nothing to do with it, too! But I actually screamed it in his face! I told him that I had lied! I told him it wasn't true that I had tried to kill myself on his account!

Grotti (*angrily, with a sneer*). But he thinks you did! Don't you know he thinks you did?

Ersilia (*aroused to her own defense, and now mistress of herself*). How can I help that? It's his remorse! It's his remorse! He would be ready to believe me—if it weren't for his own sense of guilt!

Grotti (*contemptuously*). How do you dare speak of the wrong other people have done? How dare you? You!

Ersilia. You think I have done more wrong than the rest of you? You think that I have more reason to feel guilty than the rest of you! You're mistaken! I have less reason than anybody else! Yes! Yes! Oh, I understand . . . you won't admit that, because it was I who had the courage to kill myself, and not you!

Grotti. I? I should have killed myself?

Ersilia. Oh, don't worry about that! It wasn't from remorse that I tried to die! And you—you needn't feel alarmed about anything you did! You have money! You don't have to worry about your next day's living! But I . . . I was in the street! I was poor! I was naked! And in such circumstances, you know, it's harder! . . . In my despair I thought of your little girl; and I had already experienced the last, the extreme humiliation a woman can suffer! All that together! That was why I was strong enough to do what I did!

Grotti. But you couldn't help lying even then, could you?

Ersilia. It wasn't because I meant to lie! You see—he had promised to marry me, back there in Smyrna!

Grotti. Yes, but it was a joke!

Ersilia. That isn't true! But even if it were—well, all the more dishonorable on his part! Because he didn't know about what happened there between you and me, after he went away! He got engaged to another girl here and was about to marry her!

Grotti. But you! *You* knew what had happened between you and me, and—you lied!

Ersilia. All the same, what he was doing was worse! Without knowing that I had been false to him, he was deserting me here, as calmly as you please! Actually marrying another woman!

Grotti. Just as I say, then! It was a joke! Any promise he made at Smyrna, he could not have meant seriously.

Ersilia. No! He really promised . . . but in any case, he says he meant it, now, as you have just heard! But you are saying all this to make things easy for yourself! It eases your conscience! It gives you an excuse for what you did there—behind his back—the moment he went away!

Grotti. And you raised all this rumpus here just to prevent him from marrying another woman!

Ersilia. No! I didn't even dream of such a thing! I said what I said when I thought I was going to die! I wasn't trying to stop anything, and I'm not trying to now! I refuse! I refuse!

Grotti. But supposing he had remained faithful to you . . . supposing you had found him here, quite free, and ready to make his promise good? . . .

Ersilia (*shuddering*). No! No! Never! I would never have deceived him! I swear to you by the soul of your little girl—I would never have deceived him! I didn't go near him! Ask him yourself! I didn't go near him! It was because he had betrayed me—and it was real treachery on his part—that I was able to tell the lie I told, saying that I had tried to kill myself on his account!

Grotti. You didn't look him up?

Ersilia. No!

Grotti. How did you know about his engagement, then?

Ersilia. Oh yes, I did look him up, but I went there, to the Navy Building!

Grotti. Yes! Trust you not to look him up!

Ersilia (*with difficulty restraining the helpless rage within her, threateningly*). You ought to be grateful to me!

Grotti. What for? For your having gone to look him up?

Ersilia. No! They told me he had resigned his commission in the navy and that he was soon going to be married! That took away from me every temptation of revenge! Hah! You think you have caught me? You think I had some design in going to the Navy Building? You don't understand the state of mind I was in when I went there! Here I was, absolutely alone in the world, lost, driven out of the house by your wife after she surprised us there in that terrible moment—the people down in the street calling, shouting, because the baby had fallen from the roof! I was in utter despair! I was like a beggar, with nothing, nothing to look forward to, except death—or the insane asylum! I was out of my mind, and I wanted to find him . . . to tell him everything!

Grotti. You were going to tell him about us two?

Ersilia. Not about me! About you! About you! After his departure you took advantage . . .

Grotti. Only about me?

Ersilia. Yes! And about how you treated me! Look, I can tell everything now . . . everything . . . things that no one would ever dare to tell! I have reached bottom, the very bottom. I can scream the truth that only lunatics dare tell . . . the truth that a person tells when he thinks he can never get to his feet again . . . since the truth is all he has

to hide his innermost shame! You came to me there when my flesh was tingling with the passion which he had aroused . . . when I was unable to resist the slightest touch! Deny it if you dare! Deny that I beat you, that I scratched your face, your neck, your hands, your arms!

Grotti. Oh! You were leading me on!

Ersilia. You are lying! Not in the least! It was you!

Grotti. At first . . . yes, but after that . . .

Ersilia. Never! Never!

Grotti. You pinched my arm as I was standing near you!

Ersilia. I didn't!

Grotti. You are lying! You even came up behind me once and pricked me with a needle!

Ersilia. But because you didn't leave me alone!

Grotti. Fine! Fine!

Ersilia. I was your servant! . . .

Grotti. So I suppose you had to obey?

Ersilia. My flesh . . . yes! My flesh obeyed, but my heart . . . no, never . . . my heart never! I hated you!

Grotti. But you wanted me!

Ersilia. No! No! It was hatred! I hated you—and all the more because I wanted you! After that I could have torn you to pieces like my shame itself! My heart was never yours! My heart was bleeding because I was stealing that pleasure—like a thief—betraying my real heart! I looked at my naked arms and I bit them. I yielded to you—yes! I kept yielding! But I felt all the while inside me that my heart . . . no . . . my heart never yielded! Oh, you fiend! It was you who robbed me of the only real joy I ever had in my life . . . a joy so great I could hardly believe it true—the joy of feeling that I was about to become a wife!

Grotti. Meantime he was over here, getting himself another woman!

Ersilia. So you see? You are all like that! You are all worthless! You are all dogs! And now you have the face to come and tell me that it's my fault . . . my fault because I have never had the strength to be anything . . . no . . . not one thing, not even a doll that you might make with your hands out of wax or clay! And a doll . . . well, if you drop a doll on the floor it breaks, doesn't it? . . . and the pieces tell you that at least it was a doll! But I . . . my life . . . just one day following the day before it! . . . No one whom I could ever call mine! . . . Pulled this way and that by the things about me! Never a will of my own! Never able to feel myself on solid ground! Tormented, tortured, trodden under foot! Never the power to rise and say "Here am I!" (*Suddenly changing tone and turning on him like an animal stung with a lash.*) But tell me, what are you doing here? How is it you have dared to come into my presence again?

Grotti. Because you've gone and blabbed . . . that's why! Because you've talked! You have made a mess of things! You tried to kill yourself!

Ersilia. Oh, yes! I should have kept my mouth shut, I know! A hole in the ground and a stone on top . . . and good-bye!

Grotti. As for the stone . . . you've gone and thrown it into a puddle and you've splashed the mud all around on everybody! All of us are covered!

Ersilia. Yes, and the mud sticks, eh?

Grotti. Yes, the mud sticks!

Ersilia. Whereas life . . .

Grotti. The mud sticks! You have made a cesspool all around yourself!

Ersilia. But you want me to be the only one to get drowned in it, don't you? You two want your lives to run along easily, as before! When he finds out about you and

me, he will go back to his fiancée; and you will go back to your consulate in Smyrna!

Grotti. And to all my life. A life that you, cursed woman, broke up for a moment, to my confusion! Do you think you know *me!* Do you think that bit of nonsense, that moment or two of play, was really me! And what have you made it cost me? You have made it cost me the unhappiness of my whole life: the death of my little girl!

Ersilia. It was you! It was you! I can see it all still! That chair, which I had carried up to the roof for the baby, and you didn't give me time to take it down again!

Grotti. But what were you doing on the roof? Your place was there, in the room where my wife was sleeping, sick! You should have been ready to answer if she called! What were you doing on the roof?

Ersilia. I was working, and the baby was playing!

Grotti. No! You went there on purpose . . . knowing that I would follow you!

Ersilia. What a coward! You would have come to me even there, in that room, at your wife's bedside!

Grotti. No! No!

Ersilia. Say no if you dare! As though you hadn't tried to many times before! And so—since I didn't feel safe even there . . .

Grotti. But because you wanted me, too! Because you wanted me, too!

Ersilia. No, because—you should say—because in the end, after all your insistence, after all the temptation you put in my way, I *would* have wanted you! That is what you might say! I went up to the roof so she couldn't hear . . . so your wife couldn't hear! Ah, but now I know! Something inside me kept warning me! I knew I shouldn't leave the chair just were I did! Because the baby was there with her toys, playing, on the roof! She might get up on the chair

and fall off! I knew that! My common sense kept telling me that! But I didn't listen . . . I didn't listen! Don't you remember? You came upon me from the stairway, like a wild animal! And you insisted . . . you insisted! Oh! I dream of it, nights, still! It is always before my mind! I can see it there . . . the chair . . . near the railing! I see it in my dreams and in my dreams I try to move it away . . . to move it away . . . and I can't . . . I can't! (*She bursts into a sob.* (*A pause.*)

Grotti (*absorbed in his own thoughts and trying in his own mind to get a look at his life apart from all that horror. Ersilia meantime continues sobbing convulsively*). I was busy with my work, I was always a hard worker! I lived outside myself, for other people, wholly for other people! . . . My mind always on my work! . . . And a great emptiness in my life! . . . The home I had dreamed of I had never had! The woman I had married—gloomy, sickly, unattractive! There I was, far from home, and homesick! And the gratitude of our people there! . . . They kept coming to me and asking me to help them, and they were grateful for the attentions I gave them—for my courtesy, my kindness, my assistance, . . . and this cheered me, made me patient, good-natured, affectionate, even to my wife! And you came . . . how did I treat you at first when you came?

Ersilia (*tenderly, through her tears*). You were very kind to me!

Grotti. Because the more depressed, the more unhappy I felt inside, the greater my need for doing good to others, for carrying all the burdens myself, that the lives of others might be made easier! And because of this need I felt of making life pleasant for others—that my own life, after a fashion, might be more bearable—since I could never be really happy! . . . And how I described you to him when he came into the harbor there, on his warship! How I praised

you . . . making you out the sweetest and most beautiful woman that ever lived! It was to do you a good turn, to make him fall in love with you! And during those days I was kinder than ever toward my wife, for I wanted her to be well disposed toward you! I wanted her to help me carry out the little plan I had made for your life—and I made it just for the pleasure it would give me to know that you would be owing all your good fortune to me! And when I saw that you were in love with each other . . . No, no! It wasn't because I knew that you had gone too far . . . that you had given yourself to him! . . . That made my wife angry, but not me! It made her lose all respect for you!

Ersilia. But only with him! I had never loved anyone else before! He was going away, and the night before he left . . . I was mad! I was mad!

Grotti. I know! I understand! I never thought of blaming you! And I would never have profited by your weakness, if you . . .

Ersilia I?

Grotti. Not that you meant to . . . but I don't know . . . you looked at me once as we were getting up from the table . . . because, you see, you couldn't imagine! . . . I felt that you didn't believe I had been kind to you out of a pure, unselfish desire to make you happy! That's the point! And because you didn't really understand, you spoiled everything! Because I needed that faith on your part more than ever—to keep going, to resist temptation!

Ersilia. But not temptation from me . . . not from me!

Grotti. No, the temptation within myself! But if you had understood how disinterested my kindness was, how sincere and real it was, the beast would never have awakened in me all of a sudden as it did, with all its desperate fury!

And even now, as I see you here before me, after you have laid an insurmountable obstacle—the dead body of our child —between me and that woman . . . (*He advances upon her threateningly, hatefully.*) No! . . . understand? . . . no!

Ersilia (*backing away in alarm*). What do you want?

Grotti. I want you to suffer . . . to suffer as I have suffered! . . . to suffer with me for the wrong that we have both done!

Ersilia. You want me to suffer more than I have suffered?

Grotti. All that is past! You took pains to come back to life again! You did!

Ersilia. No! No!

Grotti. Taking advantage of the remorse that you knew he would feel!

Ersilia. No! No! I have told you that I never thought of that! I have told you that I refuse to accept anything from him! And don't you see what I am? This is the house of a man I don't even know! He offered me shelter as I was leaving the hospital, where I thought, where I was sure, I was going to die! I had ceased to hope for anything, and here I am like a person called back from the grave, not knowing what will become of me tomorrow! Let me alone!

Grotti. But in the end you will do as he says!

Ersilia. No! Rather than that I will tell him everything! Do you want me to? I am ready to tell him everything!

Grotti. I refuse to be the only one to suffer punishment for the death of my little girl! I will not allow you now to go off and marry him as though that horrible thing had never happened!

Ersilia. No! No! I will never marry him! You may

be sure of that! I will stay here with the man who has taken me in.

Grotti. But you won't be able to, don't you see? He already agrees with that other fellow! They both went away together! Nota is already bored with the whole business! He surely thinks you're crazy in not accepting the boy's repentance, and the reparation which he offers!

Ersilia. But I have told him that I refuse!

Grotti. Yes, but they of course think you are just obstinate and unreasonable! Neither of them will accept your refusal as final! You have never told him the real reason why you refused!

Ersilia. Well, I will tell him if necessary!

Grotti. But then he will be disgusted with what you have done! It will seem to him so ugly—the lie you told, the trouble you have made: a broken engagement; a public scandal; pity you have wrongfully aroused; public sympathy . . .

Ersilia (*crushed and hardly able to stand*). Yes, that's true! But I . . . I didn't intend all this! I told him just as I have told you—I told him that I lied because I thought that I was going to die! The truth—we cannot tell! It is too ugly, too horrible! We two have been able to speak honestly to each other because we both are smirched with a common shame! Why do you wish, how can you wish, the truth to be told?

Grotti. I? That isn't the point! It's because of the lie! If he doesn't know what happened between you and me, he will never go back to his fiancée—he told you so—even if you refuse to accept his reparation.

Ersilia. I must tell him the truth then, so that he will return to her? Why didn't you tell the truth to her father?

Grotti. I couldn't!

Ersilia (*sarcastically*). No, you couldn't! You told

him you would come and see me and force me to confess everything! Are you so anxious for the truth, then?

Grotti (*with passionate vehemence*). Why, no, no! Why should I be? I don't know those people! I was outraged at your lie . . . and when the old man described all the trouble it had caused: the girl's indignation; the boy's remorse; his intention to offer marriage to you . . . I don't know how I restrained myself! I ran to the newspaper office to deny the story so far as it concerned me! You don't know how angry my wife got when she read it all in the papers! She insisted on going to see the young lady at once, to tell her everything . . . to tell her how you had been dismissed from our house, even how she had found you with me! I had to keep her quiet . . . I had to promise her on my honor that the consequences of your falsehood would be remedied at least so far as a wholly innocent family is concerned.

Ersilia (*sarcastically*). I understand! I understand! (*A pause. She sits looking straight ahead of her into space, her face dark and determined.*) Very well! I understand! (*She rises. Another pause. At last she says:*) Well, you go away now! Everything will be all right!

Grotti (*looking at her in dismay*). What are you going to do?

Ersilia. You said we must straighten everything out! I'll attend to that!

Grotti (*after a pause and still looking at her fixedly*). Ersilia! Ersilia! You poor child! You poor child! How terrible this has been for you! (*He runs toward her to take her in his arms.*) Ersilia! Ersilia!

Ersilia (*drawing up haughtily and holding aloof*). Ah, no! That is too much! Let me alone!

Grotti (*forcing himself upon her, trying frantically to embrace her*). No! No! Listen to me! Listen to me!

Ersilia (*repelling him*). Let me alone, I tell you!

Grotti (*insisting*). Let's go away together somewhere and live out our despair—together!

Ersilia (*tearing away from him with a scream*). Mimetta! Mimetta!

Grotti (*drawing back, pressing his hands to his face as though to shut out a horrible vision*). You murdered her! (*A pause. He is trembling convulsively.*) I am mad! I am mad! (*Again he rushes toward her.*) But I need you, Ersilia! I need you! We are just two unhappy people! Let's go away . . . together!

Ersilia (*running to one of the windows*). Go away! Go away! . . . Or I will call!

Grotti (*insisting*). No! Ersilia! Listen! Listen!

Ersilia (*throwing the window open*). I'll call! Are you going? (*The sound of a distant hurdy-gurdy playing a gay popular song enters through the open window. Ersilia points to the door with a gesture that brooks no denial.*)

Curtain

ACT III

The same set as in the preceding acts. Toward evening of the same day. Signora Onoria is standing at one of the windows, which is open, allowing unimpeded entrance to the usual noises from the street; but these are softening with the end of the day. Signora Onoria is talking with another woman, a neighbor, who is, presumably, leaning out of a window across the street. Emma, the maid, is busy with the final touches of her dusting about the room.

ONORIA. What's that? Oh, yes, yes! I'll tell you about that later. (*A pause.*) Till about noon . . . but you know how it is—that's never like sleeping at night! . . . (*A pause.*) What's that? I couldn't hear! (*A pause.*) Ah yes, yes! She's gone out now with Signor Nota. (*A pause.*) Yes, to get her bag! They wouldn't give it to him.

EMMA. And you'll see—they won't give it to her either!

ONORIA (*still talking through the window*). Oh, they couldn't, any sooner!

EMMA. I hope one thing . . . that it won't be like this every day!

ONORIA (*drawing her head in and talking to Emma*). What are you growling about? You make so much noise I can't hear a thing!

EMMA. I like to get my work done in the morning! Making beds at this time of the day! It's almost dark!

ONORIA (*again with her head out of the window*). Signor Nota was probably one of them! What do you expect? (*She laughs.*) It seems he's decided to keep her here! (*A pause.*) Not at all! She won't have anything to do with

that man! He must have done the kissing! (*A pause. Then excitedly.*) No! No! That can't be! You must be mistaken! It couldn't have been! (*A pause. She waves her hand in a gesture of farewell.*) However, I'll see you later. Good-bye! Good-bye! (*She lowers the window.*) What do you think of that? She says she saw three men in here and that they each kissed her!

Emma. Even that consul man?

Onoria. That's ridiculous! She couldn't have seen straight! That old baboon of a Signor Nota . . . he may have, but the consul—that's ridiculous!

Emma. But I heard them talking at the top of their voices when they were in here alone!

Onoria. And you didn't . . . I suppose you don't know what they were talking about?

Emma. Oh, I'm not minding other people's business! I happened to be going through the room under this and I heard them talking very loud—that's all! But she was talking louder than he!

Onoria. I'd like to know what he wants of the poor girl; and what he was doing here, after he went and made all that trouble with the newspaper, threatening to bring a suit!

Emma. He's probably trying to keep her from making up with her man!

Onoria. But what business is that of his? And she won't hear of such a thing either! For my part, I'm sorry!

Emma. I'd like to see myself turning down a perfectly good husband for an old fool like the one you have here!

Onoria. And he's getting sick of the whole business! He's trying to get out of it! And I guess he told her as much in so many words! Who knows what he must have thought . . . as if the poor little thing were making believe! I can't see how she's done so very much that's bad! I can't

understand these men sometimes! Some men . . . well . . . I just can't understand them! You'd think they were old enough to know better! They get old in years, but in experience . . . ! Why, just imagine! . . . He goes and gets her at the hospital—picks her up at death's door, you might say, with her insides all burned out with that poison—hardly able to stand on her two feet! . . . And yet, who knows what good times he was looking forward to! However, that young man comes in and says he's sorry! Then there's that newspaper reporter, afraid of a law-suit, and Nota, as nice as you please, gets scared and backs out!

Emma. It may be just as well for her in the end! When she sees he won't keep her, she'll probably make up her mind to go with the young man!

Onoria. Perhaps, but do you know how it is? She don't trust him! She don't trust him! . . . That's the point! You can fool a girl once all right, but the second time . . . well, she's more wary! Besides, what he did to her was going pretty strong! She comes here, and what is he up to? He's getting ready to marry another girl, if you please! However, if I guess him right, he's really sorry for it now!

Emma. I thought so, too!

Onoria. But, you see, she's worrying about that other girl who would be jilted on her account!

Emma. I wouldn't worry, if I was her! Why the poor thing almost died on account of that man!

Onoria. Yes! Yes! But you mustn't forget that he went away and left her in the lurch! They told all about that in the papers! Perhaps she hates him now! And she must have understood that, here, Signor Nota . . . (*She makes a wry face.*) . . . I saw her when she was going out with him . . . well . . . it seemed to me she had . . . oh . . . a sort of veil in front of her eyes. She stared at every-

thing, but she seemed not to see a thing . . . and she couldn't speak nor lift her hand! I asked her how she was, but she just smiled, and that smile—it froze me! And then again . . . her hands were as cold as ice! (*She stops suddenly and listens. Then, in a quite different tone of voice.*) Why, there's a peddler going by now! Say, you just run down and get me that ribbon—two yards and a half, as I said! I'll stop him from up here as he goes by! (*Emma runs off stage through the door, Left. Signora Onoria hurries to a window, throws it open, and leans out, looking down into the street. She spies the peddler and waves to him to stop. At this point Franco Laspiga enters through the door to the Left, his face tense and drawn.*)

Laspiga (*stopping in the doorway and calling twice, because he can hardly make his voice heard in the noise pouring through the open window*). May I come in? May I come in?

Onoria (*turning around at last and closing the window*). Oh, it's you, Signor Laspiga! Won't you have a chair? Signor Nota is out somewhere with the young lady; but he'll be right back. (*Then in a low voice, confidentially.*) You just keep at her and she'll do as you say!

Laspiga (*looking up at her in surprise as though he had not quite understood. Then sarcastically, in repressed rage*). Yes! Yes! Don't you worry! I'll keep at her all right!

Onoria (*confidentially*). He told her what was what, I assure you! The consul I mean!

Laspiga (*between his teeth*). The miserable cur!

Onoria. You're right! You're right! That poor child!

Laspiga (*losing control of himself*). Poor child be damned! . . . Poor child! You know what that woman is? She's as bad as they make 'em!

Onoria (*as though someone had struck her in the face*). Oh dear me! Oh dear me! What do you mean? (*At this*

moment Ludovico Nota enters from the Left, his hat still on his head.)

Ludovico (*catching sight of Laspiga*). Oh, you're here already? (*Then turning to Onoria, but alluding to Ersilia.*) Hasn't she come in yet?

Onoria (*turns and looks at him in amazement, then without answering turns to Laspiga*). How can this be?

Ludovico (*not understanding*). How can what be?

Laspiga (*drawing himself up with the greatest determination and speaking vigorously and with heat*). The fact is that the wife of this Grotti fellow has found out that he came here this morning for a meeting with his mistress!

Ludovico (*with a start, in utter astonishment*). Who? What mistress?

Onoria. She? The consul's mistress?

Laspiga. That's what I said! Though I might have used a worse word! So Grotti's wife went to my fiancée's this morning and denounced the whole intrigue to her parents!

Ludovico. Intrigue! What intrigue? Signorina Drei —with her husband?

Onoria. Signorina Drei . . . the consul's mistress?

Laspiga. Exactly! Yes, ma'am! Yes, sir! What I don't know is whether this all happened *before* or *after* I asked her to marry me out there in Smyrna! That's what I want to find out now! I came here for that purpose!

Onoria. Mercy on us! With that man! So they were in cahoots out there, eh? Ah, now I understand! That's why that woman said . . . (*She nods toward the window.*) Aha, so that's why she said what she said!

Laspiga. What do you mean?

Onoria. Why, the woman in the house across the way saw them, and she said he kissed her!

Ludovico. Here? Here in this room?

Onoria. Yes, here in this room! That's what the woman told me, and I wouldn't believe it! She saw him kissing her, through the window there!

Laspiga. What did I tell you? (*To Ludovico.*) Right here . . . in your house!

Onoria. Why! Why! Why! This is beyond me! Why! Why! I don't know which end I'm standing on!

Laspiga. And do you know how, and do you know when, Grotti's wife caught them at it? Their baby fell off the roof and was killed!

Onoria (*with a scream, covering her face with her hands.*) Oh dear me! Dear me!

Laspiga. Yes, she caught them! They were together! And she drove this hussy out of the house, because, between the two of them, they had left the baby alone on the roof!

Onoria. Murder! Murder is no name for it! How do they ever dare look an honest person in the face again? Poor baby! So that was why! So that was why! And they didn't pay her ticket home! I should say not! . . . After all that! . . .

Laspiga. If it weren't partly his fault, too, jail would be the place for her! She ought to be in jail!

Onoria. Jail would be too good for her! I should say so! You are quite right!

Laspiga. And after all that, you understand . . .

Onoria. . . . she had the brazen face . . .

Laspiga. . . . to come and stir up trouble for me!

Onoria. And not only you—everybody! She's made trouble for everybody!

Laspiga. But do you realize what she's done to me?

Ludovico (*musingly, almost to himself*). I wonder! I wonder! . . .

Onoria. And posing around here as a martyr! My, what a fraud!

Laspiga. Everything kicked sky high! My name in the papers! A public scandal! The girl I was going to marry slamming the door in my face! I thought I was losing my head! How I managed not to, I'm sure I don't know!

Onoria. So that's why . . . that's why she wanted to get away! The moment she saw you, the moment she found out that other man was here, too, . . . (*She mimicks Ersilia's voice.*) "I won't!" "I won't see anyone!" "I don't want to talk with anyone!" Ha! You bet she didn't! The little fraud! She could see her game was going to be found out! (*Spitefully, changing her tone of voice.*) I wish I could get back a few of the tears I've wasted in sympathy for her! Poor, downtrodden, little girl, trying to kill herself because she had been betrayed! (*Snapping at Ludovico.*) Let me tell you one thing, Signor Nota: you get that girl out of this house this minute! I won't have her in here again! My doors are closed to her! This is a respectable house! I cannot afford to be mixed up in such a mess!

Ludovico (*annoyed, but at a loss for something to say*). Let's not be in too big a hurry now! Suppose we wait!

Onoria. Wait? I've waited long enough! You get her out of here at once! I won't have her! I won't have her!

Ludovico. But don't talk so much! I can't hear myself think! Just a moment now! (*To Laspiga.*) How does it happen that the consul . . . (*He breaks off.*) You know, don't you, that the consul was the very first one to protest against the article in the paper?

Laspiga. That's easy to understand!

Ludovico. It doesn't seem to me so easy to understand! They should have stuck together, it seems to me—as lovers!

Laspiga. Yes, but his wife was there with him! His wife . . . and this girl had made the newspaper say atrocious things about his wife!

Ludovico (*remembering*). Ah, yes! That's so! And in fact . . . yes . . . that's why she was so much embarrassed when she found out that the newspaper had said . . .

Onoria. . . . that this poor woman had sent her up to the roof on an errand!

Laspiga. His wife must have forced him to deny the story!

Ludovico. So then the whole thing is an imposture!

Laspiga. And a very low-down one! It's vile! It's rotten!

Ludovico (*continuing*). She must have been lying when she said she tried to commit suicide on your account!

Onoria. What I should like to know is how a girl could lie as brazenly as that!

Ludovico (*thoughtfully, to himself*). Ah yes! Of course! And that's why she refused so obstinately to accept any reparation from you!

Laspiga. It would have been the last straw if she *had* accepted!

Onoria. I should say so, you poor man!

Ludovico (*irritated more and more by Onoria's chatter and led accordingly to disagree with Laspiga*). No! Listen! You must admit that she had at least one scruple!

Laspiga. And when, if you please? When she saw me here, ready to straighten out a mess I thought myself responsible for?

Ludovico. I understand that, but . . .

Laspiga. And this too, notice, only on the most favorable hypothesis—on the hypothesis, I mean, that she became his lover *afterwards!* If she was his lover first, I would be the victim—well . . . imagine for yourself! The victim of the most cowardly deceit conceivable on the part of both of them!

Ludovico. Oh no! Hardly that!

Laspiga. I've come here this time to get that point clear!

Ludovico. What do you think you can do? Certainly you can't deny that you met the most decisive and violent opposition on her part!

Laspiga. But I'm talking about what went on *before!* What went on before!

Ludovico. Ah no! That's going too far! In the worst case you would never have suffered any wrong!

Laspiga. I wouldn't? Why not? I . . .

Ludovico (*insisting*). No wrong whatever! Even if it did happen *before!* You were about to marry another woman here, remember!

Laspiga. Not at all! Just a moment! . . .

Ludovico. Let me finish! You were getting even by betraying her!

Laspiga. But I admitted the wrong I was doing!

Ludovico. Even so, you would have been getting even in advance for a wrong you didn't as yet know they had done you!

Laspiga. You mean that what I did excuses them?

Ludovico. Certainly not! But it does prevent you from getting on your high horse! You are not in a position to blame them!

Laspiga (*violently*). I beg your pardon! I am in a position to do just that! And she will have to explain: because they went the full length: they played their whole trick on me, while I called my marriage off and came hurrying here!

Ludovico. But not until you heard that she had tried to kill herself!

Laspiga. But it wasn't on my account! She has confessed that herself!

Ludovico. But you didn't know that! Here you were, quietly arranging—in ignorance of their duplicity toward you—to marry another woman! You were planning to play

your trick on her! It seems to me you're quits, to say the least!

Laspiga. That's a great idea! You're blaming me for what I did as though anything I might have done could ever be regarded as treachery toward her!

Ludovico. No! No! Look! I'm not blaming anybody! I'm simply trying to show you that you are right only in one respect . . . in the fact merely that she told a lie when she said—without having any right to say it—that she tried to kill herself on your account! Now that lie . . . that lie . . . well, it interests me! I can't understand why she should have told that lie! . . . and have told it there, on the very brink of the grave!

Laspiga. Why? Because after she had been dismissed on account of the baby's death, she came here with the intention of resuming her relations with me!

Ludovico. But no! The moment she found out that you were about to be married . . .

Onoria (*speaking up*). She took poison, eh?

Ludovico (*to Laspiga*). . . . without even trying to see you!

Onoria. But are you sure it was real poison she took?

Ludovico. Oh, as for that! . . .

Onoria. Well, let us say it was! Couldn't she have figured on their saving her, and in that case, on everybody's taking her side—a person like you, for example? . . . And come to think of it . . . where did she go to take her poison? To a public park, where she couldn't help being found right away and carried to a hospital!

Ludovico. But she refused to accept Signor Laspiga as her husband right here in this room—and she was in earnest!

Laspiga. Yes, that was when she saw all the harm her lie had done . . . and not to me only! She had made trouble all around! I had come back repentant and she felt she

couldn't accept what I had to offer! Oh, you don't understand what went on inside me here! You don't know how I suffered all those days! Why, you yourself kept encouraging me not to lose my grip on myself! Well now, just consider how I must feel on discovering it was all a low and vile intrigue! I don't know what I ought to do!

Ludovico. I don't see that there's anything to do! What is there to be done now that everything is clear?

Laspiga. Ah, no! You people have been telling me that all I had to do was show my contempt for her . . .

Ludovico. The best you can do is go away and marry the girl you were going to marry!

Laspiga. No! No! I have been humiliated disgracefully! I've been made a fool of!

Ludovico. But just remember this . . . after all, whether it was remorse or poverty or what not, this poor girl tried to kill herself!

Laspiga. I know what she's done to me!

Ludovico. You're right! But after all, not till after you had done her all the harm you say, and not knowing that the truth, naked and raw as it is, would be discovered! Oh, really, you can't claim that she tried to deceive you!

Laspiga. Why did she do it then—if not to trick me, if not to get even with me?

Ludovico. By killing herself? She wanted to prevent your marriage, eh? But why did she care about that when she would soon be dead? Unfortunately there on the street, she didn't happen to find a man she really liked or who liked her! Oh, come now, Signor Laspiga, when a woman goes so far as to confess a thing like that, rest assured that she's not trying to get even with anybody! Surely she didn't tell that lie to get even with you!

Laspiga. So it wasn't to trick me, eh? And it wasn't to get even with me? Well, why was it, then!

Ludovico. Well, as I said, I don't know why she told that lie! I can't understand it! Lies may be useful for a person intending to live, but hardly for a person intending to die! She herself has recognized that the lie was quite useless!

Laspiga. But those words are yours, not hers!

Onoria. You are simply refusing to take account of the facts!

Ludovico. Ah, there we have it! You're right! It is one of my faults! I never am able to take account of the facts!

Onoria. Well, I'm glad to hear you admit as much yourself! Now for the facts! You know what they are? Fact number one: she didn't die!

Laspiga. And the lie did prove to be useful to her! Yes, I insist upon the word *useful!* If the lie didn't win me back—thank heaven for that! . . . it at least enabled her to find a person like you . . .

Onoria. Just imagine . . . a novelist!

Ludovico. Yes, a fool, you really mean.

Laspiga (*speaking up quickly*). Oh, I don't say that!

Ludovico. You might as well!

Onoria. What's the harm, since he says so himself?

Laspiga. Certainly she must have been flattered! Hah! I should say so! . . . to see her lie picked up from the gutter and glorified in the realm of art . . . the romantic story of her suicide for love, written up, printed, published, and this time not by a mere newspaperman, but by a writer of your reputation!

Ludovico. Yes, that's so! She did ask me to.

Laspiga. So you see!

Ludovico. She was even disappointed that the heroine I had thought of was not herself but another, a different sort of woman.

Onoria. You two would have made a fine team: she telling the lies and you writing them down!

Ludovico. Lies? Yes! But we call them stories sometimes, don't we? But it's not the story's fault if it isn't true! It's almost better that it shouldn't be true, so long as it's beautiful! It's an ugly story for her, as she lived it, but that won't prevent it's turning out very well for me, as I write it! I can say more than that: it's much more beautiful the way it is! Ah, yes . . . much, much more beautiful . . . and I'm glad that we have gone to the very bottom of it! (*To Laspiga pointing to Onoria.*) Here's this woman, for example! At first she was as cross as could be because I brought the Signorina here! Later on she became all honey! And now look at her, if you please, . . . the living picture of holy horror!

Onoria (*rising in her wrath*). And why shouldn't I be?

Ludovico (*approving*). Of course! You should be! You're quite right! Quite right! But as I was saying, for a story it's splendid . . . it couldn't be better! (*Turning to Laspiga.*) And there you were: when you first came, yesterday—quite out of your head!

Laspiga (*reacting in his turn*). But I admitted that, myself!

Ludovico (*again approving*). Yes! yes! Quite so! Quite so! I wasn't blaming you! But for that reason . . . beautiful for the story . . . beautiful! But may I ask you good people . . . you think I'm playing the fool here? You do, don't you? Very well! So I amuse myself by pointing out how beautiful it is, how exquisite, how perfect, this comedy of a lie discovered!

Laspiga. Beautiful . . . exquisite . . . you say?

Ludovico. Precisely because it is so terrible to you and because you have suffered so! It is true, very true, that you have suffered and are still suffering! Believe me, I under-

stand . . . I am keenly conscious of all that you are suffering! You may be sure that I will draw your feelings to the life, if I decide to put you into a novel or a play!

Onoria. Aren't you going to give me a little part in it, too?

Ludovico. Perhaps, if I decide to make a farce out of it!

Onoria. Well, don't you dare go putting me on the stage!

Ludovico. What would you do? I suppose you'd make a noise and say it wasn't true?

Onoria. That I would! I would say it wasn't true, and that you were an impostor to match that girl!

Ludovico. Why go to all that trouble? The critics would say that for you! So don't bother! (*Changing his line of thought.*) But why isn't she here? It's getting late! She ought to be back by this time! The only money she has is what I gave her . . .

Onoria. Ah, so you gave her money! I see! In that case you needn't worry!

Ludovico. I gave her just a little money to pay her bill at the hotel and get her baggage back!

Onoria. If you gave her money, we'll never set eyes on her again! She'll never come back here! And good-bye to your comedy! I won't have to worry about what you say of me!

Ludovico. Ah, as for that, you can't be sure! There's always a way to put an ending on a comedy even if the story doesn't end in life!

Laspiga. Are you really afraid she will never come back?

Ludovico. Well, that depends! It's this way! If the purpose of the lie she told lay in the "facts," as you say, I'm afraid she won't come back again! She'll come back only in case her purpose was, as it seems to me it must have been,

above and beyond the facts! And in the latter case, I shall have my play . . . though I'll write the play anyhow, even if she doesn't come back!

Laspiga. Ignoring the facts, then!

Ludovico. Facts! Facts! You're always harping on the facts! My dear Laspiga, facts are what we assume them to be; and then, in their reality, they cease to be facts, and become mere semblances of life which appears in this or in that or in some other way! Facts are the past, when the spirit yields—those were the words she used—and life goes out of them! That's why I don't believe in facts! (*At this moment Emma appears in the door to the Left and announces.*)

Emma. Signor Grotti, the consul, is calling! He wants to see the young lady, or at least you, Signor Nota!

Ludovico. Ah, so he's the one who is coming, instead of her!

Laspiga (*drawing up in a haughty, threatening attitude and facing the door pugnaciously*). He's coming at the right moment!

Ludovico (*going up to him and speaking calmly, but in earnest*). I must remind you . . . this is my house! You will be careful, therefore, not to make any trouble! And I repeat . . . you have no right to demand anything of anybody!

Laspiga. I suppose I have the privilege of stepping outside?

Ludovico. No, you will be so kind as to remain here! I will attend to this gentleman! (*Grotti appears in the doorway in great anxiety and agitation. Emma withdraws.*)

Grotti. Good afternoon . . . good afternoon, sir! May I see Signorina Drei?

Onoria (*alarmed, irritated, but bubbling over with curiosity*). But she isn't here! She's gone away!

Laspiga. And perhaps she'll never come back again!

Grotti. Oh, but you people don't know . . . I should speak to you rather, Signor Nota!

Ludovico. You have forced your way into my house without being invited!

Grotti. I must ask your pardon for that; but I must find out whether Signorina Drei is aware that my wife . . .

Laspiga (*breaking in*). . . . went to my fiancée's this morning and betrayed . . .

Grotti (*breaking in violently*). . . . her own lunacy!

Laspiga. So you deny her story?

Grotti (*angrily and with contempt*). I have nothing to confirm or to deny—to you!

Laspiga. You are mistaken, sir! You *are* called upon to answer *me!* . . .

Grotti. What would you have me answer? Tell you that my wife is crazy? I am ready to guarantee that any time you wish!

Laspiga. I shall remember that, sir!

Grotti (*turning to Ludovico*). Signor Nota, I am anxious to find out whether Signorina Drei is aware of what my wife has done.

Ludovico. I hardly think so!

Grotti. Thank heaven for that! Thank God! Thank God!

Ludovico. She was with me all the time! I left her because she had to go back to the hotel where she stayed . . .

Grotti. You didn't know, yourself?

Ludovico. No! I found Signor Laspiga here on my return, and he told me.

Grotti. Good! I am glad of that! In the state of mind in which she is at present this added blow . . .

Ludovico. The fact is that we have been waiting for her for some time; and she isn't back yet. . . .

Laspiga. But if she doesn't know, it is more than probable that she suspects. Signor Nota here gave her a little money . . . there's a chance that she's run away!

Grotti. I wish that could be true, but unfortunately I fear . . .

Laspiga. Ah, so you admit then . . .

Grotti. I admit nothing!

Laspiga. Yes, that's the part of a gentleman!

Grotti. But don't you understand that I don't care a damn what you think? You may believe anything you wish, anything you please!

Laspiga. Anything I please? No, thanks! I am after the truth! What I want is the truth, and not something I should like to believe!

Grotti. And what then? Supposing I tell you that my wife's story is not true? You refuse to admit that you were the one who got her into all this trouble?

Laspiga. But if she was driven out of your house by your wife—innocent, without the slightest responsibility for the death of your child! . . .

Grotti (*emphatically*). That is not true!

Laspiga. It's a lie, then?

Grotti. I went to the newspaper office to clear up that point . . . to protest against that lie!

Laspiga. But then you came here to fix up a story with her!

Grotti (*restraining himself with difficulty*). I came here because your fiancée's father asked me to come here; and I found that she—for that matter in your presence and in the presence of everybody here—was in despair because you . . .

Laspiga (*interrupting, forcing his point*). . . . because I wanted to make reparation for the wrong I had done!

What I want to know now is this: why should she feel that way if the wrong I did her was really a wrong?

Grotti. Why, because she doesn't want you and your reparation! That's evident! Because she doesn't want you . . . She doesn't want you! That's reason enough, isn't it? She told you so, and she repeated it! Can't you get that through your head?

Laspiga. But you can't suppose that that helps me very much! That's not the point! You are taking advantage of her state of mind to put me to one side here, so that you can play your part more easily for the benefit of this gentleman (*pointing to Ludovico*), giving him to understand that there is nothing to your wife's story! But I am here not because I want to be, but because she—out of her own mouth—publicly declared that she had tried to kill herself on my account!

Grotti. But hasn't she already confessed that she was lying?

Laspiga (*violently*). A second lie, then! Lie number two! Who was obliging her to lie? Was I?

Grotti. Who knows? She may have said "no" for that very reason!

Laspiga. So then, it may actually be true that she tried to kill herself on my account?

Grotti. I don't know why she did it!

Laspiga. If it's all as you say it is, she did it on my account, because I had betrayed her! I don't see any other reason for her doing so!

Ludovico. Unless it was for the reason she gave me a little while ago!

Laspiga (*turning on him violently*). But no, excuse me! Just a moment ago you said that you could think of no reason, yourself!

Ludovico. Well, I meant to say . . . it was such a

disgrace, wasn't it? Out on the street there . . . in the gutter, like a beggar!

Laspiga (*ironically*). Yes, and she offered herself that night to the first man who came along!

Grotti (*his face darkening*). She said that?

Laspiga (*coming forward, insisting, with fury*). Yes, she said that! Just that! And she said she would have done it, too—all on my account, because I had betrayed her! Well, in such a case, you think I could help insisting, with all my soul and conscience, on her accepting my reparation! In any case, I am still ready to make the same offer and insist upon it . . . if you, for your part, will give me your word of honor that your wife told a lie in saying that this girl has been your mistress! (*Emma dashes in through the door to the left, screaming in terror.*)

Emma. Signora! Signora! Oh! Oh! Signora!

Onoria. What's the matter?

Ludovico. Is she here? Is it she?

Emma. Yes, sir! She has come back!

Onoria. Where is she?

Emma. Oh, I opened the door . . . and she fell in . . . with her bag . . . in her hand!

Ludovico. Oh, that poison! In her bag! She had poison in her bag! (*The stage is in great commotion as Ersilia appears in the doorway to the Left. She is pale but calm. Her face is soft, sweet, almost smiling.*)

Onoria (*drawing back as do the others*). Oh, there she is!

Grotti (*with an outburst*). What have you done? Ersilia! Ersilia!

Laspiga (*instinctively, almost to himself*). Ah, they did! He betrayed himself!

Ludovico (*running toward Ersilia to keep her from falling*). Signorina! Signorina!

Onoria (*with a shudder, to herself*). Oh, again! Again!

Ersilia. It's nothing! Hush! (*She makes a gesture of silence, her forefinger across her two lips.*) This time—it's nothing!

Grotti (*with a cry*).. No! No! We must do something for her! Get her a doctor, at once!

Onoria (*frightened*). Yes, a doctor! A doctor! Get her to the hospital!

Ludovico (*taking Ersilia's arm*). Yes! Yes! Come, Signorina, come!

Ersilia (*drawing back*). No! I won't! Please don't! I won't!

Grotti (*advancing*). But yes! Come with me! I will take you!

Ersilia (*as above*). I won't, I say!

Ludovico. Oh, please, Signorina, come, do as we wish! Don't say no! Come!

Onoria. I will send for a carriage!

Ersilia. Oh please! Don't torture me! It would do no good!

Grotti. How can you be sure of that? Let's hurry! We mustn't lose any time!

Ersilia. It would do no good! There's no help possible now! But hush, please, all you people! Let me alone! If you, Signor Nota, and the Signora here . . . it won't be right away . . . but . . . I hope . . . soon! . . .

Ludovico. Yes! Yes! What do you want? What do you want?

Ersilia. Your bed!

Ludovico. Why yes, right away . . . come!

Onoria. Come! Come!

Grotti (*again breaking in, with violent emotion*). What have you done? What have you done?

Ersilia. Never mind! Please go away! Let me alone!

Ludovico. You ought to have remembered, Signorina, that I was here! You could have stayed here with me!

Ersilia. But if I hadn't done this, no one would have believed me!

Laspiga (*desperately, in a paroxysm of agony*). But believe what . . . believe what?

Ersilia (*calmly*). That I didn't lie, just to gain something! That's all!

Laspiga. But why did you tell the lie then?

Ersilia. It was just to die! There! Don't you see? I told you . . . I told you as loud as I could that when I told that lie I thought everything was over with me—and that was why I told it! You weren't willing to believe me, and you were right! I didn't really think of you! No, not at all! You're right! And I didn't dream I would upset you so, make it hard for you . . . but I had such a loathing for myself!

Laspiga. But why? You accused me . . .

Ersilia. No!

Laspiga. How can you say that!

Ersilia. No! It's so hard to explain it, let alone believe it! But now I'll tell you! I had such contempt for myself!—could I suppose I would cause you all this trouble? But now you can believe me! Look! I wanted first to earn this right to be believed, just so that I could tell you! I caused you all this trouble, you and the girl you were to marry! And all the time I realized I ought not be doing it! That I had no right to do it, because . . . (*she looks toward Grotti, then turns again to Laspiga*). You found out about *that,* didn't you? From his wife!

Laspiga (*hardly able to speak*). Yes!

Ersilia. I foresaw that! And he came here to deny the story, didn't he?

Laspiga. Yes!

Ersilia. So you see! . . . (*She looks at him and makes a gesture of disconsolate pity, barely opening her two hands, a gesture which explains without words the reason why tormented humanity feels the need of falsehood. Then she adds in a very faint voice.*) And you too lied!

Laspiga (*deeply moved, with an impulse of sincerity, understanding her accusation*). Yes! I, too! I lied, too!

Ersilia (*her face brightening with a smile*). Lied? You put a dream of yours into words . . . oh, things of beauty . . . that you dreamed . . . and you came here to help make things right! Yes—just as he did (*pointing to Grotti*)! He came here to help make things right — and he lied! (*Grotti bursts into tears. Ersilia loses her composure and begs him with a gesture to be still.*) No! No! Please don't! We all of us want to make a good impression! The worse we are, the uglier we are—the more anxious we are to appear good and beautiful, . . . That's it! (*She smiles.*) Hah! Yes! That's it! But I was naked! I had nothing beautiful to put on! . . . Then I learned that you, too, yes . . . you had taken off your uniform, your wonderful sailor's uniform . . . And then I found myself . . . I found myself in the street without anything—and . . . (*Her face darkens at the memory of that evening on the street after she left the hotel.*) Yes, just one more bit of mud upon me . . . one last touch to make me dirtier than before . . . one last touch of filth! Oh, how disgusting! How horrible! And then . . . well, then I wanted at least to be buried in decent clothes! Just a decent dress to die in! There! That's why I lied! That's why I lied! I assure you! Never in my whole life long had I been able to make a good appearance in life! Every dress I wore was torn off my body by dogs . . . yes . . . dogs . . . dogs who barked at me and jumped out upon me from here, from there, from everywhere! I was soiled with all the lowest and

vilest filth in the world! But I wanted a good dress to die in, something beautiful to be buried in . . . the most beautiful dress in the world . . . the one I had dreamed of, the one I had hoped for, out there, as the realization of a dream, but which was torn off my back like all the others: a wedding dress, the dress of a bride . . . the dress of a wife! But it was to die in! It was to die in! A tear of sympathy from people . . . that was all! But no . . . no . . . not even that have I been allowed to keep! You have torn it from me . . . even this one you have torn from my back! No! No! I must die naked! I must die discovered . . . despised . . . humiliated . . . found out! So there! Are you satisfied? Are you satisfied? Now go away and let me alone! Let me die in silence—naked! Go! Go! I can say it now! Can't I? I can shout it at all of you, can't I? There's no one I want to see! There's no one I want to talk to! Let me alone! Let me alone! Go and tell it to them all—you to your wife, and you to your fiancée . . . that I am dead . . . yes, and that I died naked!

Curtain